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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# RETURNING TO LEARNING: MOTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF 49 NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FULL-TIME POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

BY
MARY C. THOMPSON

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Returning to Learning: Motives and Experiences Associated with Re-entry into Full-Time Postsecondary Education for 49 Nontraditional Students, submitted by Mary C. Thompson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

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May 15, 1989

This thesis is dedicated with affection and respect to Robin, Bob and Lorette, three nontraditional students who succeeded despite long odds, and to the late Nancy Jonnasen, who did not get the chance to start over.

# ABSTRACT

This study examines the situation of 49 nontraditional students attending the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Community College with a focus on two central research questions: first, what personal forces were at work which led the student to return to learning at a non-normative juncture; and second, what were the consequences of combining the re-assumed student role with typical adult roles occupied by these people. This group of men and women represent a new and growing constituency of university and community college student bodies. Descriptions of contemporary systems included in educating adults and the adult socialization process are important to understanding how the informants made their decision to return and how the result of the decision affected them. Attention is directed to the differences between the experiences of students at the University of Lethbridge and their counterparts attending Lethbridge Commmunity College. The study is an attempt to build on the slim body of empirical information on nontraditional students. Both economic and non-economic motives for re-entry were investigated, partly to clarify contradictory results found in the earlier studies of Thompson (1987) and Chapman (1986). While non-economic influences were the most salient for the majority of the sample, the problem of identifying what portion of employment-related influence is economic and what portion is self-realization (non-economic) complicates the issue. A triggering event in the months immediately preceding the decision to re-enter was present for 84 per cent of the respondents. One response to the triggering event was

particularly prevalent: the report of a review of one's life experience and re-evaluation of values and priorities. Sources of difficulties and dissatisfaction were identified as mainly those associated with attempting to perform multiple and inherently conflicting roles, and educational services. Sources of satisfaction were found to cluster mainly around personal growth. Multiple sources of interest in re-entry and multiple sources of satisfactions and dissastisfaction were found. The influence of socioeconomic, gender and age variables were found to be less significant than predicted in the literature.

# PREFACE

My interest in the topic of nontraditional students began with my own start on a post-secondary educational venture at the age of 42. After a 25-year working career, I entered the University of Lethbridge in 1985 searching for a knowledge structure which would help me make sense of some of my occupational experiences. Superimposed on my own reintroduction to the dimly remembered role of "student" was an awareness that there were other older students among the student body who, like myself, seemed to be looking for something. I began to document their experiences and my own, and to compare the information thus gained to the experiences of traditional students who so markedly outnumbered us at every turn of campus life. Eventually, my informal preoccupation metamorphosed into an academic focus. To fulfil the requirements of a research scholarship, I completed a formal research project involving my nontraditional cohort at the University of Lethbridge in 1987. The present study builds on what I learned from that study and from the new questions it raised.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis may never have been written without the spark of interest ignited by Dr. Frances Puffer, who introduced me to the sociology of education, or without the support of Dr. Patricia Chuchryk (University of Lethbridge), who supervised the 1987 study which was the source of inspiration for the present work. I am indebted to Dr. Chuck Hobart, who supervised this thesis under the handicap of the 350 mile distance between Edmonton and Lethbridge. I am grateful for the help of committee members Dr. Harvey Krahn, who helped me with analytical and theoretical issues and Dr. John Young, who encouraged me to use qualitative research methods. My thanks go to Dr. Donald Chapman (University of Alberta, Vocational Education), who made investigating nontraditional students a less solitary adventure. My thanks also go to Dr. Dean Stetson at Lethbridge Community College and Ms. Marilyn Withage at the University of Lethbridge, who cooperated so that I had access to student records. I appreciate the proofreading help given by Lorette Poulette and Ken Moore, my former fellow nontraditional students. Lori Bennett has my undying gratitude for her assistance in preparing the thesis for reproduction. My final and most heartfelt appreciation goes to the 49 men and women who were my research subjects, and who despite daunting workloads, were unfailingly willing and helpful.

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# CHAPTER I

# THE SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEM

## A. Introduction

By 1984, nearly 21 per cent of Canadian adults were graduates of universities, university colleges or community colleges, an increase of 4 percent in just half a decade. Full-time postsecondary enrolment increased by a third within a decade: in the 1985-86 academic year, there were 789,800 full-time students were on the campuses of Canada's 82 universities and 200 community colleges. Roughly 60 per cent (467,300 students) were attending universities and 40% (322,500) were attending community colleges (Statistics Canada, 1988). The postsecondary student body is usually described as young adults between ages 18 and 24, but the statistics also contain a subgroup of older adults who are largely "invisible" because of the manner in which institutional statistics are collected.

Investigating the participation by older adults in Canadian post secondary education is absorbing because these people are not the traditional clientele of universities and community colleges. Their presence does not conform neatly to many assumptions valid for their traditional counterparts. One important difference is that they are not completing their education in a sequential manner, having occupied typical adult roles for years or decades before returning. For the individual an important source of difficulty is the need to integrate the role of student with these pre-existing adult roles. As Chapman (1986:6) notes, nontraditional students are anomalous participants

presence and student experiences are often confusing to themselves, their families and the institutional system.

This study examines the situations of 49 nontraditional students attending the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Community College. It focuses on two central research questions: first, what personal forces were at work which led the student to return to formal learning at a non-normative juncture; and second, what were the consequences of combining the re-assumed student role with typical adult roles already occupied by these people. This group of men and women represent a comparatively new and growing constituency of universities and community college student bodies. Descriptions of contemporary systems included in educating adults and the adult socialization process are important to understanding how they made their decision to return and how the result of the decision affects them. Attention will be directed to the differences, if any, between the experiences of students at the University of Lethbridge and their counterparts attending Lethbridge Commmunity College.

Particulary important for the development of this study was to try and locate it within a theoretical tradition encompassing personal experiences in institutional settings. As used here, institutions refer to those primary or secondary formalizations of human groupings, including the family, organizations of work and educating institutions. The sociological literature associated with adult socialization provides a rich base for this study. It should be noted however, that empirical research focusing on the adult student is dominated by investigations of

adults who are engaged with other adults in specially constructed learning situations. These learning situations, usually labelled "adult education" or "continuing education", are normally outside the main track of post-secondary education. There are few studies of the adult student participating in the main track of post-secondary learning designed for younger students.

**B. Background to the Problem**

Formal education, paid for by public funds, had become a routine element in Canadian society by the middle 1800s. Since that time, university education in particular has grown spectacularly. In 1985, Canada's universities conferred 90,000 degrees. Canadian community colleges, largely 20th century phenomena, grant over 60,000 diplomas and certificates each year (Guppy, Balson, et.al., 1986:171). Concomitantly, the rising level of educational requirements for entry or promotion is a prominent feature of the modern occupational system. All sectors of the occupational structure have been affected by the dramatic increase in educational requirements which began after World War II (Collins ,1979:7-8). Collins declares that an "educationocracy" has been created to the extent that education, the technical component of which is frequently irrelevant to the performance of a job, has become central to economic stratification.

While it was not unusual at the turn of the century for an individual to remain in the same work or home role for a lifetime, this is rarely the case in the present day. The nature and content of work are changing as never before. People are responding to the fact of occupations in

transformation by making frequent movements between employers within careers, and by making two or three major career changes in their lifetimes (Peterson, 1981). Since World War II, a tactic for career change or advancement used with increasing frequency is the completing of a postsecondary degree or diploma (Cross, 1981; Campbell, 1986). This is also a tactic for those who have experienced blocked career mobility, those who have employment disadvantages and those who have experienced loss of financial security (Chapman, 1986; Mackie, 1987; Thompson, 1987). As used herein, the term "employment disadvantaged" is the definition used by Employment and Immigration Canada for purposes of priorizing its job development funding programs: women, people with mental or physical handicaps and Natives. These are persons perceived to require special assistance to gain access to employment. An educational deficit at the level of compulsory attainment is common.

Given that education is arguably the most important predictor in occupational success, it does not seem surprising that the pursuit of academic credentials is a prominent feature of contemporary society (Collins, 1979; Masuda, 1981). For the traditional student who enters post-secondary education in an uninterrupted sequence after high school, it is assumed that parental occupational level is a chief predictor of occupation, However, in several studies reviewed by Collins (1979:3), years of education had much more significance for predicting the individual's occupational attainment than did parental occupational level. He notes that Blau and Duncan (1967) found a correlation of .60 for the former and only .40 for the latter, while Sewell and Hauser

(1970) obtained correlations of .62 and .33 respectively, indicating that students with parents having higher educational attainment status are the most likely clients of universities.

For the nontraditional student, it is unlikely that the same factors will be influential in the same way because of the effects of parental characteristics are mediated by years or decades of intervening personal experience in adult roles such as worker, spouse or parent (Cross, 1984). Failure to continue on to postsecondary education after high school as been associated with lower parental socioeconomic status, but also with gender and ethnicity. Up until the 1960s, women were less likely to continue on than men because their expected role was in the home instead of the workforce (Mifflen and Mifflen, 1982). Many women who did continue were frequently of higher socioeconomic status, sent to campus to attract a potentially successful mate rather than to earn a credential for their own occupational success (Skelhorne, 1975).

Especially since the end of World War II, traditional patterns of family life and work are transforming rapidly as technological advances exert pressure on the needs and demands of individuals, groups and their institutions (Peterson, 1980; Masuda, 1981; Campbell, 1984; Voydanoff, 1984). To the extent that this advanced stage of development urges social, economic and political change, the impact on the individual is nowhere more striking than on occupational and family life. Traditional gender role stereotypes, in which men are characterized as breadwinners performing waged work outside the home and women

are seen as wives and mothers peforming non-waged (and therefore largely invisible) work inside the home are clearly antiquated (Voydanoff, 1984). A change in gender roles is clearly indicated by the dramatic increase in employment of women which has occured in Canada, especially from 1930 onward. By 1981, 52 per cent of women of working age were engaged in some form of waged work (Lowe, 1987).

How to accommodate the emergence of new roles and the decline of older ones in this situation can produce bewilderment and dissatifaction for the individual, or it can produce a sense of excitement and freedom (Clausen, 1986). Change associated with shifting roles requires people to adapt, which may involved the voluntary seeking of opportunities to learn new things at various points in one's life (Peterson, 1980). Consequently, the concept of a linear life plan in which one's education is acquired on the basis of a front-end load is no longer feasible (Campbell, 1984). It is not surprising therefore that in recent decades, widespread participation by adult learners in post-compulsory education has become ubiquitous in First World western nations where the extent of role change has been profound and the process is not yet complete (Costello and Richardson, 1982). Boaz (1978) pointed out that the increase in participation in postsecondary educational activities by American adults after World War II was over twice as great as the rate of growth of the eligible population. From this Cross (1984:7) concludes that factors other than demographics must be at work.

Although the education of adults has existed at least since the Greeks, the multiple forms and delivery systems of contemporary adult

education are responses to social and demographic changes associated with advanced urbanization and industrialization. These changes include shifts in fertility patterns, the increase in the life span, the compression of the work-life span, the increase in personal social crises such as divorce, and the presence of structural unemployment (Best and Stern, 1976). Bell (1982) suggests that on the individual level, people may seek to open previously closed economic or social "doors" around middle age after earlier careers. In any case, people in increasing numbers re-enter learning after years or sometimes decades in work, family and/or parenting roles to seek, renew or enhance intellectual, personal and/or vocational fulfillment.

Tough (1971) suggests that nearly all adults are engaged in some sort of learning project if all forms of adult education are taken into account. Here adult education is defined as *the engagement by the individual in any sustained, highly deliberate effort to learn a knowledge or skill* . Cross (1983:79-80) portrays the adult learning force in the United States as having a pyramidal structure with a broad base of self-directed learners, the middle strata (perhaps 30 per cent) in some form of organized instruction and a small minority (perhaps 5 percent) at the apex who are studying in postsecondary institutions for academic credit and credentials. In Canada, these credential-seeking learners may make up 30 per cent or more of the student body in these institutions, with about 80 per cent being part-time students and 20 per cent being full-time students (Novak and Thacker, 1989). Among traditional Canadian postsecondary populations, males have outnumbered females since 1911 (Mackie, 1987). However, the

situation is reversed for nontraditional students, where females account for two-thirds of the population (Novak and Thacker, 1989).

The focus of postsecondary education has been and remains on the full-time student from 18 to 24; on launching the young person who is loosening bonds with the family of origin to take his or her place as a productive and stable member of society (Chudwin and Durrant, 1981; Campbell, 1986). This is so at the undergraduate and graduate levels: it is still the norm for people to continue through into graduate education in a more-or-less unpunctuated sequence (Chapman, 1986). As such then, the traditional student occupies a boundary role between adolescence and adulthood. In contrast, the student who has already assumed adult roles such as worker, spouse or parent is an anomoly in postsecondary education, despite two decades of exceptional growth in numbers.

**C. Statement of the Sociological Problem**

The empirical literature directly corresponding to participation by adults in main track postsecondary education is comparatively sparse and loosely linked. The studies concerning adults engaged in the broader category of non-compulsory learning are generally concerned with education which is variously labeled the "third track", "continuing education" or "adult education". These terms generally describe specially constructed education programs which are usually pursued on a part-time basis as an adjunctive activity to typical adult roles. Many different community agencies offer adult education, much of which is non-academic and much of which does not lead to a formal

accreditation. Where universities and community colleges are involved, much of the adult education literature is of little theoretical relevance because it is oriented towards policy and practice associated with the concept of educating adults as a field of endeavor distinct from main track postsecondary education.

Further limiting the usefulness of most of the adult education literature base in a Canadian setting is the fact that, although some studies are now emerging on adults in main track postsecondary education, much of this literature is coming from the United States. It is also frequently focused on women, who compose the majority of new adult learners in terms of numbers (Novak and Thacker, 1989). That adult learners in main track postsecondary education now participate in numbers sufficient to be considered a discrete group is apparent if one accepts the observation by Kasworm (1980:32) that "older adult undergraduates are becoming a significant [and] unique subculture within the traditional undergraduate environment." Given this proposition, the situation with the adult education literature suggests that many of the assumptions underpinning it should be critically evaluated..

Cross (1984) notes that there is no profile of the adult learner because of the inconsistency of definitional boundaries, and because this body of learners is considerably more heterogenous that its traditional counterparts as a result of intervening life experience. Further, statistics on the growing body of adults who return to the postsecondary learning environment and study beside the traditional student clientele are submerged within a larger body of data on student bodies. It is

difficult to extract information on these students from institutional records because it does not constitute a separate body of information as with adult or continuing education departments. These people are adults *in* education rather than participants in adult education. This situation, despite the assertion that these learners form a subculture, implies that postsecondary institutions have not yet fully come to terms with this clientele.

An earlier study by Thompson in 1987 and one by Chapman (1986) attempted to identify some of the factors associated with the decision to return to undergradute postsecondary learning made by adults. Given the dearth of relevant literature on nontraditional students in main-track postsecondary education, both studies relied on the profiles of adult learners produced from the perspective of specialized adult education. Thompson and Chapman both found evidence countering the common argument that the most likely re-entrants into formal education are those seeking upward economic mobility [see, for example, Solomon and Gordon (1981); Cross (1984); Campell (1984)]. Thompson (1987) did find multiple motives, as suggested by the general literature, but her evidence was equivocal with regard to the primacy of an occupational locus of interest.

The findings of Chapman (1986), Thompson (1987) and Novak and Thacker (1989) were able to support the widely-held premise in the literature relating to adult education that adult re-entrants into main track postsecondary education encounter significant role overload, strain and conflict. The nontraditional student has usually had several

years or even decades of occupational and/or family experience, and re-assumes the role of student alongside of these other roles. Thus, this student is very likely to be dealing with multiple and quite dissimilar roles, resulting in roles strain and role conflict (Skelhorne, 1975; University of Alberts Senate, 1983). It has also been found, however, that this particular combining of incongruent roles may also produce high levels of satisfaction which coexist along with strain (Chapman, 1986; Thompson, 1987; Novak and Thacker, 1989).

The central sociological problem of this study is to describe the motives and experiences of the 49 nontraditional students with regard to their enrollment as full-time students in traditional postsecondary education. To address this problem, the study utilizes the empirical literature on adult education, which is mainly of American origin, and attempts to build on the few Canadian studies of adult *in* education. Where relevant, theories of participation in adult education are considered. The ultimate goal of the study is to add to the limited scholarly information on the relatively new phenomenon of adults *in* education.

**D. Research Questions**

This research is concerned with the full-time mature adult learner in main-track postsecondary education. These learners are estimated to make up about 20 per cent of a new, probably permanent, nontraditional clientle in Canadian postsecondary institutions (Novak and Thacker, 1989). In particular, the research is concerned with identifying factors which contribute to the adult student's decision to return to main-track credit learning, and identifying some of the

satisfactions and difficulties associated with re-entry. These two sets of factors will be used to describe why these adults choose to re-enter and what were some of the consequences.

There are two central questions addressed by this research, each of which is associated with a major dependent variable or variables:

1. What are some of the factors which affected the decision of the 49 nontraditional students to re-enter postsecondary education?

2. What are some of the sources of satisfaction and of strain that the 49 nontraditional students experienced after their educational re-entry?

There are four major dependent variables which can be grouped into pre-entry variables and post-entry variables. The pre-entry variables are: 1) the reasons these nontraditional students returned to learning, and 2) the events in their lives prior to re-entry; while the post-entry variables are: 3) sources of satisfaction associated with the role of nontraditional student, and 4) sources of strain associated with the role of nontraditional student.

**E. Terms and concepts**

Following and extending the work done in my earlier study (Thompson, 1987) and that of Chapman (1986), the terms and concepts which are relevant to this study are defined here. However, there are some inherent limitations to those which are associated with descriptions of

life-cycle phases based on chronological age. As argued by Brim (1976:7) and Baltes and Schaie (1973:367), age-linking of adult development is a popularized but somewhat useless carryover from concepts in child development. The following nine concepts are relevant to this study.

Adult role refers to the three major roles typically considered part of the adult portion of the life-cyle: parent, spouse, and worker. These roles are associated with marker events occuring after the student has completed compulsory education. The age of approximately 23 is frequently used as the approximate age of transition into adult roles ( Cross, 1984). Adult roles are often considered to be of an economic nature, whether direct (provider) or indirect (care-giver);

Economic gain motives refers to reasons for enrollment which can be associated with the desire for financial reward;

Educational services are those services of the educating institution which are not involved in the imparting of knowledge or skills to participants, but with which the student comes into contact both voluntarily (as in the case of personal counseling) and on a compulsory basis (academic advising, registration);

Life review refers to a consideration of one's present circumstances by the individual which includes the self-assessment of whether one is "on time" or "late" for normative life cycle phases;

Nontraditional student refers to a student over the age of 24 enrolled in a university or community college for academic credit at the undergraduate level who had no previous postsecondary experience and who is returning to the educational setting after an interruption of at least five years spent in adult roles. The student may or may not have fully completed compulsory education, but in any case is atypical of the university or community college student clientele;

Personal growth motives refers to reasons for enrollment which can be attributed to the desire for personal enhancement in some form having a non-economic nature. This is also referred to as a self-realization or self-actualization motive;

Traditional student refers to person who is participating in postsecondary education as a direct continuation of compulsory education. This role is typically occupied by persons between the ages of 18 and 23 who are in the process of breaking away from the family of origin and moving towards adult roles. Education for this group is said to be associated with acquiring the skills and dispositions necessary for full membership in society and not with economic support of others;

Student role refers to activities which are directly associated with enrollment in an institution granting academic accreditation. These activities are principally the acquisition of knowledge or skills;

Trigger event refers to an unexpected, unplanned event in the individual's life which is of sufficient magnitude to precipitate a major life path change.

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

## A. The literature

Although they have some reference to the sociology of education, the research questions stated in Chapter I are informed by the tradition of social psychology. The six hypotheses stated herein are all empirically based rather than deductions from theories, and this study seeks to test for consistency with other studies. However, contributions from theories which are relevant will be introduced as appropriate. The hypotheses relate to the four dependent variables seen as relevant for nontraditional students: the decision-making processes and motives for participation which result in re-entry (pre-entry variables), and role satisfactions and strains which are among the consequences of re-entry (post-entry variables).

### 1. The decision-making process leading to re-entry

Cross (1984) proposes that participation by adults in organized education cannot be predicted in the same way as it is for younger people who are completing their educations in the normalative sequential manner. As Clausen notes (1986:96-98), unless the young adult enters a family-owned business, parental socioeconomic status, student motivation and intelligence predict educational attainment. For the older student these influences are mediated by the life-experience of the individual in conjunction with adult roles (work, marriage and parenting). The outcomes of experiences in adult roles in this intervening period are asserted to have more influence on the decision

to participate than socioeconomic descriptors (Cross, 1984; Chapman, 1986).

Cross (1984:79-80) claims that in general, social class may describe who becomes a learner in adult eduction, but not why he or she participates. She asserts that demographic descriptors for adults may be only remotely connected to educational interests and aspirations. However, one demographic variable - age - seems to be a powerful predictor of participation (Cross, 1984:57). Typically, individuals occupy a sequence of developmental roles which are normatively prescribed, and adult development can be seen as a task related to age-appropriate role transitions rather than the acquisition of new roles. (Brim, 1966). However, passages through phases of adult life may elicit changing perspectives such that the subjective sense of one's age becomes more salient than chronological age. A sense of urgency to make up for lost time and opportunities perceived to have been missed or denied may be present (Neugarten, 1969; Dion, 1985).

A changed perspective on personal time has been associated with the concept of a mid-life crisis. Jacques (1965) argues that coming to terms in midlife with one's eventual death can produce a sense of crisis. Levinson (1978:191) disagrees that a fear of death precipitates a sense of crisis. He proposes another explanation: around the age of 40, [men] must acknowledge the negative features of present life situations and consider new choices. He insists this mental activity of review and reappraisal of the outcomes of one's life-to-date occurs precisely between the ages of 38 and 43, but he offers no support for why this must

be. Brim (1976:367), however, suggests that the concept of a male midlife crisis is closer to astrology and tea-leaf reading that social science. In any case, one's perspectives on personal time are examples of cognition: received information about the individual's social environment and personal characteristics on which he or she performs mental operations. These operations produce transformation of the information into cognitive structures, such as schemas, which eventually influence overt behaviour (Markus and Zajonc (1985:138).

Clausen (1986:163) argues that there is no reason why a perception of crisis cannot occur at some other age than around the fourtieth year. "Crises", he writes, "occur when the individual is unable to adapt or otherwise cannot resolve dilemmas...". Given this perspective, the notion of a midlife search for new information to give insights to one's past life experience or to address newly discovered or long-sublimated interests is inconsistent with the concept of "crisis" as used by Jacques or Levinson. The consideration of different options for future activities may indeed be associated with a sense of liberation and excitement as argued by Cross, (1984) and Clausen (1986). Midlife re-entry into the student role has been described in various ways by Chapman (1976) and Thompson (1987) as salvaging what is left of life, being a "late bloomer", taking a second chance or opening new doors.

A search for new meanings may be initiated by an unexpected event which may interrupt the flow of normative transitions. This event can exert a great influence which may profoundly redirect one's life-path (Bandura, 1977; Baltes and Schaie, 1973; Aslanian and Brickell, 1980).

These twists of fate, which Bandura (1977:30-35) refers to as "fortuitous events", trigger casual chains in the same way that normative events do, and may or may not have permanent effects. The content and extent of these trigger events varies from trivial to major. Major events such as loss of job, loss of spouse, or illness, which involve the loss of a socially valued role, may produce a sense confusion and anxiety more clearly associated with a sense of crisis. However, Bandura's concept of a path-branching event turns on the notion that "people are not controlled by the fortuitous event but shape resulting conditions to suit their own purposes." (p 35). As deCharms and Muir (1978:93) observe, determinants of change are within streams of action, not isolated variables.

The socialization task of individuals from 18 to 25 years of age is to make the transition into the mature roles of adult work, marriage and family. Personal identities are strongly influenced by what the individual becomes occupationally (Brim, 1966). Clausen (1986:151-52) observes that age 40 is commonly regarded as a watershed in North America. It is an age when people are expected to have demonstrated the promise they exhibited in earlier decades. Bell (1982) suggests several reasons people may reassess the outcomes of their earlier lives and become interested in a second chance, including being declared occupationally redundant, being trapped in uninteresting work, perceiving that one's competitive edge needs sharpening, desiring to test one's capabilities, and seeking to fill the void left when earlier roles are vacated. For some adults, a strategy for opening previously closed doors will be a return to formal education. However, not all nontraditional

students have educational deficits; some may simply want a different life.

2. The motives for participation

Because groups of adults are likely to be less homogeneous than their younger counterparts, due in part to their intervening life experiences, there has been no useful profile developed which is representative of the adult learner. Further, as Cross notes (1984:8-9), inconsistencies and changes in definitions of "adult learners" complicate the issue. However, there are some basic assumptions made by the Canadian Association of University Continuing Education (CAUCE) in 1970 about adult learners: the adult learner comes to his or her education with a given structure of experience, a commitment to learning, specific learning needs and the desire to link new learning with life experience. Several writers concerned with adult learners in general provide clues to determinants of the decision making process which ultimately results in participation.

Houle (1961) identified three groups of learners: those who are *goal-oriented* and use learning to gain concrete objectives such as a job or personal skill; those who are *activity-oriented* for whom acquiring knowledge or skill is a by-product of participation; and those who are *learning-oriented* who are curious, have the desire for personal growth and participate for the joy of learning. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) found that the majority of adults participate in new learning for practical rather than scholarly reasons; they seek applied knowlege rather than theoretical information. Tough's (1968) study concluded

that people have multiple reasons for attending, but are most often motivated by the pragmatic desire to use or apply the knowledge or skill thus gained. He proposed three patterns for entering learning projects: 1) with the awareness that one wants to do something which requires new learning, 2) a puzzlement about issues of things that are important to the particular individual and 3) the unpremeditated decision to invest time in the learning project.

Burgess (1971) identifies nine goals for participation which seem partly to contradict Tough's assumption that people are pragmatic learners. These goals include intellectual curiosity, the desire for social contact, the quest for personal fulfillment, the desire to escape other situations and the acquisition of cultural knowledge. Morstain and Smart (1974) locate six factors of participation, including associative needs, social welfare (the desire to serve to community), expectations of others (primarily those with formal authority), professional advancement, cognitive interest, and escape or stimulation. Solomon and Gordon (1981) believe that adults are heavily career-oriented and are more likely to enroll in community colleges where business-related courses dominate the curricula. Cross (1984) adds that community colleges attract olders students more than universities because they are perceived to have instructors and curricula which take account of adult needs and interests.

Cross (1984) argues that most adults who enroll in adult education do so more in the hope of solving some particular problem than with the intent of learning a subject. The chief source of problems is to be found

in social mobility, and thus the focus of the adult learner is on instrumental learning for occupational purposes. Campbell (1984) describes adult needs as compensatory or remedial to satisfy personal objectives, economic with the focus on occupational reorientation, vocational to attain initial qualifications or offset their obsolescence, or social as in the need to adapt to changing personal or external circumstances. According to Rainwater (1984) and Dubin et. al. (1976), however, labour force participation may be of a prefunctory nature; not all people view their work as their central life interest.

What is clear throughout this literature is that adult learners are assumed to have multiple reasons for becoming involved. Although they may be labelled in many different ways, these reasons fall into two general categories: occupational (economic) motives or personal growth (non-economic) motives. In Tough's (1968) study of self-directed learning projects, he found that the average number of reasons for attending was 5.4. Burgess (1971) found a clear tendency for people to report multiple motives within broad, socially desirable categories. He also identified a goal hierarchy. In Thompson's 1987 study of nontraditional postsecondary students, every respondent reported at least two motives, and most could easily rank them in order of importance.

A social congnition perspective involving Lewin's (1951) field theory and Maslow's (1954) hierachy of needs is the stated basis for theoretical models of decision-making proposed by several writers. Miller's(1967) Force Field Analysis model posited that personal satisfaction is more

likely to be a motive of the socially privileged who have survival needs met, while employment disadvantaged people are more likely to have pragmatic motives to cope with survival uncertainty. He specifically equates survival with occupational competence. Rubenson (1977) explained motivation for re-entry by his Expectancy-Valence Paradigm in which a positive decision is the sum of values that the individual places on anticipated consequences. Reference groups are also important in this model to the extent that their negative evaluation of education may be the critical variable in determining valence for some people. Boshier's (1973) Congruence model, while dealing primarily with adults who decide not to return to learning, states that participation relates to the magnitude of the discrepency between one's self-concept and perceptions of people and structures in the educational environment.

Tough (1979) suggested an Anticipated Benefits model in which people are assumed to have some sense of what the benefits of obtaining [more] education will be. Benefits are clustered around pleasure, self-esteem and reactions of others and have a progression: the activity of learning, the retention of new knowledge or skills, application of the knowlege or skill for gain and realization of reward (material or symbolic). Cross (1984) proposes a Chain of Response model in which persons who have self-confidence deficits will avoid participation because of their need to avoid testing self-esteem. Stronger self-confidence promotes the investigations of options for action, the assessment of external barriers and the formulation of coping strategies. Like Tough, Cross believes

that the attitudes of "ignificant others" towards education will be an important factor militating for or against participation.

Levy (1970:137) concludes that the need for achievement is an important motivator. He defined this as the need to overcome obstacles, to exercise power and to strive to do something difficult as well and as quickly as possible. Mifflen and Mifflen (1982:134) propose that one's locus of control has to be considered. Schooling and achievement are more likely to be valued by those with an internal locus of control who see these outcomes as the result of personal efforts rather than external influences. However, this sense of personal control over one's life-course is distributed differentially to the extent that people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged in some way are less likely to feel powerful in this regard (Fanelli, 1977:47-51). This includes among others, women, older people, visible minorities and those with educational deficiencies. Wolfgang and Dowling (1981) found that older students are more likely to have an internal locus of control than are their younger counterparts. Their reasons for attending are less likely to be associated with pressure from external sources.

3. Satisfactions and dissatisfactions of re-entry

The effects of education are strong: it is a possession which has great value in social exchange, which implies that people will expend resources of time, energy, and money in securing it (Bourdieu, 1977). In this sense education is an investment in oneself with a perceived payoff in the future. A payoff in the form of a secure, well-paying occupation has been proposed as the most valued outcome for the traditional

student (Becker, 1975; Guppy, Balson et.al., 1986). However, Chapman (1986) and Thompson (1987) have argued against this conclusion for nontraditional students, suggesting that non-economic personal empowerment is the most salient payoff for this older group. In any case, the investment concept implies that people are probably willing to undergo a certain amount of sacrifice to obtain the resource.

The traditional student has been directed into postsecondary education, usually immediately after the completion of compulsory schooling, usually because of parental and educational influences (Mifflen and Mifflen, 1982). This student thus occupies a transitional role which may be characterized as a pre-adult role: a role on the cusp of the adult world (Thompson, 1987). It is not a role which entails socioeconomic responsibilities. The nontraditional student must re-occupy this non-adult role while at the same time having a biography of adult experience and probably concurrent with continuing occupancy of some or all of the previous adult roles. The role which the adult student finally creates to act in a system geared to the traditional student is a hybridization of different and often conflicting, values, beliefs and behaviours (Jarvis, 1985:217).

Most adult students routinely face problems that younger students do not have to burden themselves with, such as seriously conflicting demands on time, financial problems, parenting or marital conflicts, or lack of confidence with academic capabilities (Thompson, 1987). Adult students are likely to experience role conflict, role strain and role overload. Further, the more disparate the roles occupied, the greater

the potential for difficulty in sustaining all of the expectations inherent in the various roles (Bandura, 1977). For the nontraditional student, it has been found that role problems are significantly related to gender, such that women are more likely to report these difficulties than are their male counterparts (Skelhorne, 1975; Lovell, 1980; Kirk and Dorfman, 1983). Role difficulties are further complicated by the amorphous nature of the role of nontraditional student, and by the highly variable educational services for this new group (Thompson, 1987).

Points of transition from one role to another are periods of extra stress for the individual (Brim, 1966; Bandura, 1977). This is especially so where the role being assumed is not normatively sequential, where the requirements of the new role are unfamiliar to its new occupant, or where the role itself is ambiguous because it is an emerging role for which boundaries and expected behaviours have not yet crystallized (Brim, 1966, Voydanoff, 1984). The nontraditional student role is just such a role. Difficulty in role transition is also associated with the abandonment of a role in which the individual has a particularly heavy identity investment. Traditionally these have been waged occupational roles for men and family care-giving roles for women (Mackie, 1987). If the new setting contains similar others who have been in the new person's situation as a previous recruit, they can ease the transition by serving as an information resource (Wheeler, 1966).

Kirk and Dorfman (1983) found that the most significant factors of satisfaction for re-entrants were associated with interpersonal

relationships (helpful instructors, supportive friends, understanding children) while the most significant factors of dissastisfaction were extrapersonal experiences (job dissatisfaction, student financial aid, child care provisions). Chapman (1986) and Thompson (1987) reported that feelings of mastery and new or regained personal power were significant. Thompson (1987) argued that adult students are likely to view their life-experience as a positive contribution to their educational experience, and do not feel particularly disadvantaged in comparision to their younger counterparts in terms of their ability to understand concepts. They are, however, aware of a deficit in

The awareness of a memorization deficit suggests that nontraditional students experience a difference between their own learning processes and those of their younger counterparts. This awareness suggests the psychological change in primary abilities which occurs with aging between what has been termed "fluid intelligence" of the younger learner and the "crystallized intelligence" of the older learners (McPherson, 1983). Younger people with fluid intelligence must be provided with a conceptual framework because they have limited ability for abstract reasoning, while older people with crystallized intelligence have a conceptual framework already in place based on their life experiences. There is disagreement among researchers, however, on what represents changes in intelligence (underlying abilities) and competence (adaptive behaviour) in empirical studies (McPherson, 1983:198-199).

The presence of a supportive spouse is especially salient for women, as reported by Markus (1977), Chapman (1986) and Berkove (1979), while the absence of support from significant others creates additional stress (Lovell, 1980). For women, the presence of children in the home is more likely to interfere with their student role than it is for men (Badenhoop and Johansen,1980; Chapman,1986; Thompson,1987). The major source of strain for adult students in multiple roles is time, (Skelhorne, 1975; Lovell, 1980; Kirk and Dorfman, 1983; Thompson, 1987; Novak and Thacker, 1989). Financial limitation as a source of strain is identified by Kirk and Dorman (1983), Chapman (1986) and Thompson (1987). Academic strain, in the form of anxiety over taking examinations, is reported by Thompson (1987) and Novak and Thacker (1989).

Pike (1978) identified several disadvantages for older students participating in mainstream postsecondary learning designed for traditional students, including full-time residency requirements for some programs and funding streams, campus-centered activities, daytime class scheduling and sets of classes sceduled in modules (block scheduling). He also noted that part-time participation has its own set of drawbacks, one of which is the misperception that part-time students produce inferior academic work. Medsker (1975) found that program flexibility (location, scheduling, self-choice and pacing) can be a "draw factor" for adult students who need to avoid systems which interfere with their ability to respond to family needs. Cross and Zusman (1979) found that block scheduling is a deterrant to participation of adult students in certain programs.

Campbell (1984:73-74)) reports that adults frequently complain about the clumsiness of educational services, particularly intake and support activities. The complaints center on lack of responsiveness to the differences between traditional and nontraditional students in terms of the latter's burdens of child care, personal and financial worries. Responsibilities of adult roles may conflict with the requirements of registration, counseling or other non-learning but required activities . Special encouragement is often needed in the early stages for those who have been away from the classroom for some time. Cross (1984:235) proposes that situational characteristics exert more influence on adult students than do learner personality characteristics.

Campbell (1984) also reports that adult students are more likely to have a focus on a particular career destination than their younger counterparts. For this reason, the nontraditional student is often seeking a specificity of information about accessing occupations which [university academic] counselors are not accustomed to dispensing. A sense of the future, or an alternate vision of reality, is frequently present (Rainwater, 1984; Chapman, 1986). Choice of a new future career is often shaped by what is perceived to be available (Rainwater, 1984), what is perceived to be congruent with family role requirements as provider and/or care-giver (Ibsen, 1967; Holland, 1985) and what is perceived to "fit" one's self image (Hewitt, 1984). However, choice of career by nontraditional students is a process, not an event; the choice has an etiology peculiar to the student's adult life-experience (Zwerling, 1976).

Thompson (1987) found that issues involved in the choices adult students make between university, community college or other modes of institutionalized learning are most often pragmatic. Major issues include expense, length of time needed to achieve the targeted accreditation, entry qualifications, and perceived immediacy of payback (Zwerling, 1984; Cross, 1984). In addition, Chapman (1986) and Thompson (1987) found that proximity of the learning institution was an important mediating factor. Adult students struggle to minimize the disruption of normal adult roles while maximizing the learning opportunity. Because community colleges may be perceived to be less threatening, they may attract older students unsure of their academic competency (Zwerling, 1984; Cross, 1984).

To summarize, the literature reviewed herein suggests the proposition that the participation by adults in organized education cannot be predicted by parental socioeconomic status as it is for younger people. However, age has been posited as an important factor predicting participation. Participation may be related to a changed perspective on personal time. Unexpected events may precipitate changes in life-paths, redirecting the individual into enrollment at a non-normative juncture. Such an event may or may not be perceived by the individual as a personal crisis. While it is generally agreed that motives for enrollment are multiple, there is no consensus as to whether personal growth or occupational motives are foremost in the decision-making process. Social cognition theories have been proposed to explain adult re-entry utilizing balance models and hierarchical needs models. Role

conflict and role strain have been posited as major sources of difficulty for nontraditional students, along with institutional support services which are geared to traditional students.

**B. The Research Hypotheses**

There are six hypotheses deriving from the two research questions presented in Chapter 1 which are suggested by the literature review. The first two of these deal with pre-entry variables while the remaining four deal with post-entry variables. Please refer to Appendix 1 (interview schedule) for details of specific items testing the hypotheses.

Triggering Event

The presence of a precipitating event experienced by individuals which diverts the life course towards re-entry into institutional education at a non-normative juncture, and is attributed by the student as a chief source of the decision has been noted by Aslanian and Brickell (1980) and Chapman (1986). According to Bandura (1977) these incidents may be of a major nature such as the loss of a central adult role (spouse, parent, economic provider), or a less dramatic transition such as moving to a city in which there are postsecondary institutions. Therefore, it is proposed that:

> Hypothesis No. 1. The decision to re-enter non-compulsory institutional education will be positively associated with the presence of a triggering event in the life of the re-entrant in the immediate past.

This hypothesis will be tested using items 44, 45 and 46 on the interview schedule.

Motives for re-entry

Although multiple motives for re-entry are generally accepted, the literature is equivocal on which class of motives is most salient. Johnstone and Rivera (1965), Tough (1968), Solomon and Gordon (1981) and Cross (1984) argue that instrumental motives associated with the acquisition of technical skills for occupational purposes are primary. In contrast, Burgess (1971), Morstain and Smart (1974) and Chapman (1986) believe that non-instrumental self-realization motives are primary. Later in this study (Chapter V) I will argue that propositions about motives require clarification because of conceptual confusion: terms such as instrumental, occupational and economic are used interchangeably and without symmetric negative equivalents. Given that this study is a work of social psychology, which takes into account the social components of choice, it is proposed that:

Hypothsesis No. 2. The most salient influence of the decision to re-enter post-compulsory institutional education will non-economic.

This hypothesis will be tested using items 47 through 57 on the interview schedule.

Satisfactions and dissatisfactions of re-entry

The role of the nontraditional student is a source of strain because it is generally ambiguous to the extent that it is relatively new and unusual (Jarvis, 1985). The nontraditional student role set contains different and often conflicting values beliefs and behaviours associated with the mixing of adult and pre-adult roles. Nontraditional students experience frequent role difficulties associated with time management, financial hardship and academic anxiety (Skelhorne, 1975; Kirk and Dorfman, 1983; Chapman, 1986; Novak and Thacker, 1989). However, even in the presence of stressors, nontraditional students are very likely to report significant levels of satisfaction with their lives associated with mastery and personal empowerment (Chapman, 1986, Novak and Thacker, 1989). Therefore, it is proposed that:

> Hypothesis No. 3. The nontraditional student will generally report satisfaction with present circumstances.
>
> This hypothesis will be tested using items 65 through 70, 71 through 76, 86 and 94 on the interview schedule.

Influence of sociodemographic variables

a. Gender of informant. Cross (1984) asserts that for those participating in adult education, men are more likely to have occupational motives than women, while Chapman (1986) and Thompson (1987) found that for nontraditional students in [main-track] education, men were not as likely to have occupational motives as

it may be that the concept "occupational" requires clarification. It is proposed that:

> Hypothesis No. 4. The motives for re-entry will be significantly different on the basis of the informant's gender such that women will be more likely than men to have occupational motives.
>
> This hypothesis will be tested using items items 47 through 57 on the interview schedule, controlling for gender of informant.

Skelhorne (1975), Markus (1977), Berkove (1979), Lovell (1980) and Kirk and Dorfman (1983) found that women suffer more role difficulties than do their male counterparts. It is further proposed that:

> Hypothesis No. 5. The difficulties which the nontraditional student subsequently experiences after re-entry will be significantly different on the basis of the informant's gender such that women will experience more difficulties than men.
>
> This hypothesis will be tested using items items 65 through 70, 71 through 76, 86, 87 and 94 on the interview schedule, controlling for gender of informant.

b. Age of informant. Cross (1984) argues that age is the most important determinant of the decision to return to learning. Other references to the subjective sense of time by Jacques (1965), Levinson (1978), Dion (1985) and Brim (1976) suggest that age 35 may be significant for the subjective sense of time, especially for males. To test this, it is proposed that:

> Hypothesis No. 6. The experiences associated with re-entry will be significantly influenced by the age of the informant such that older nontraditional students will experience more difficulty.
>
> This hypothesis will be tested using items 65 through 70, 71 through 76, 86, 87, 94 and 95 on the interview schedule, controlling for age of informant.

# CHAPTER III
# METHODOLOGY

Lethbridge, Alberta was chosen as the site for this study for three reasons. First, it fit the criterion of having both a university and a community college. This criterion came from my interest in extending the earlier research (Thompson, 1987), which used a sample of nontraditional students at the University of Lethbridge only. I wanted to include nontraditional students in the other postsecondary setting in the city to find out something about how or if these students might differ. Because both institutions are similar in the size of their student bodies and have campuses with similar resources, issues of the differences in mandate might become more prominent. Administration at Lethbridge Community College perceives its mandate is to provide initial vocational training or retraining with a practical orientation, while administration at the University of Lethbridge perceives its mandate is to provide initial intellectual training with an intellectual orientation.

Second, the relationship between the college and the university is interesting. Contrary to Zwerling's (1973) findings, Lethbridge Community College is not perceived locally as "second best". Indeed, until the major restructuring and reorientation of the administration at the University of Lethbridge which began in 1987, Lethbridge Community College was the more successful of the two institutions in terms of being seen as progressive and vibrant. Third, gaining access to confidential student records is a difficult process. Access was made considerably easier by the familiarity of both administrations with my

earlier undergraduate work. This important advantage would not have existed in another locale.

The following discussion of methodological issues is organized to present information on sample selection, mode of data gathering, limitations to the chosen mode and strategies for analysis:

**A. The research site**

Lethbridge is a small city of 60,000 in the southeastern part of Alberta situated between the large urban center of Calgary and the Canadian-U.S. border. It serves as the major trading centre for a regional population of 150,000, who come from an area having a radius of about 100 km and live in scattered small towns, hamlets and rural areas. The regional economy is primarily agricultural, although some light industry and resource extraction is present.

Lethbridge Community College was established in 1957 and was the first public community college in Canada. The present student population of 3,789 is comprised of 2314 full-time students in courses leading to a certificate or diploma. The campus has been undergoing extensive modernization and expansion since 1983. Students over the age of 21 comprise about two-thirds of the student body, leading College administration to portray the institution as catering to the the needs of adult students. The College is pursuing closer academic ties with the University of Lethbridge, but administrators feel that the University's response has been limited. Thus, the College is seeking relationships

with other postsecondary institutions elsewhere in the province which are perceived as more receptive (Talbott, 1989).

The University of Lethbridge was established in 1967, and operated from the campus of the community college until 1971 when construction of its own campus across the city was completed. The present student population of 4,098 is comprised of 2658 full-time students in courses leading to a diploma or degree. The University has embarked on an ambitious program of capital construction and revitalization of academic staff and support services. It continues to be visualized by administration as primarily catering to traditional students, although concessions are being made to nontraditional students in such areas as new student housing (Tennant, 1989).

**B. Sample selection strategy**

The sample was drawn from the nontraditional student populations of the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Community College. A sampling frame of student names was retrieved from current registration records of each institution and screened to meet five criteria: date of birth earlier than January 1, 1963, enrolled on a full-time basis, no enrolment prior to September 1, 1987, no prior community college or university experience and enrollment in two-year diploma programs at the College or four-year degree programs at the University. The purpose of these criteria was to capture a sample of students over the age of 24 who were thus nontraditional clients and had some intervening life experience in roles normally associated with

adulthood-work, marriage, parenting. The unit of analysis was the individual student.

The choice of full-time students as research subjects was based on the premise that their re-appropriation of an earlier role on a full-time basis in conjunction with their existing adult roles is more likely to produce strain than is the case for part-time students. Students having full-time status must often subordinate other roles to academic requirements, whereas part-time students have more ability to tailor academic schedules to their needs. The choice of mature undergraduates in traditional postsecondary education has a similar rationale vis-a-vis strain: adult education is generally geared to adults in terms of scheduling, while mainstream postsecondary education is not. The choice of both men and women as subjects in this study is part of the attempt to extend other studies, which often tend to focus on women. This is particularly so for those studies involving satisfactions and difficulties associated with re-entry.

The University of Lethbridge records yielded 51 students who fit the selection profile, while 197 students who met the criteria were obtained from the Lethbridge Community College records. By random selection, the College sampling frame was reduced to 51 students so that a total of 102 individuals were selected from both institutions. Of that number 10 were found to have permanent addresses out of province (4 University students and 6 College students) and were eliminated because of the method of investigation chosen (personal interviews). A letter from the author requesting an inteview, supported by the respective registrars of

the two institutions, was sent to the remaining 92 students (47 University students and 45 College students). A total of 57 positive responses were received (61.9 %).

Two of the 57 responses were later eliminated when the additional criterion of an upper age limit of 55 was added. This criterion was added retroactively because the two respondents who fit in this category (ages 60 and 69) were judged to be not representative of the nontraditional definition as used herein. Both of these respondents were retired individuals receiving company pensions, had no dependents, could not state a particular reason for returning and had no future occupational destination. On analysis of the raw data, they were found to be qualitatively different to a level judged unacceptable.

As interviewing progressed, two College informants were found not to be returning in the next semester. However, on analysis of the profiles of these students using the raw data, they were found not to differ qualitatively from their continuing counterparts, unlike the two older informants eliminated earlier. Hence it was concluded that their inclusion would not compromise the analysis and they were left in the sample. Both had dropped out because of financial difficulties, but otherwise their re-entry and experience profiles were indistinguishable from the rest of the sample. The circumstances of these two informants highlights the issues connected with barriers to re-entry and continuance found in the literature, given that both dropped out because of difficulties relating to their adult roles as financial providers.

A further five potential informants proved to be impossible to contact after three attempts, while one person failed to show up for the scheduled interview twice. Forty-nine informants were interviewed, giving an end response rate was 53.26 per cent. The response rate for those enrolled at the University was proportionally lower than for those enrolled at the College (47% and 62% respectively). This may in part be due to the unsolicited letter of introduction issued by the College's administration which accompanied the mailout of interview requests. This may be a source of bias in the data, but it was not considered unacceptable.

**C. Method of data gathering**

1. Choice of mode for gathering data

The selection of a method for gathering data was predicated on the outcomes of the author's previous experience with studying a sample of the full-time nontraditional undergraduate population (Thompson, 1987) and the experiences of Chapman (1986) with a similar group. In 1987 a self-administered questionnaire consisting of forced-answer questions was used in the earlier study of 76 informants, while Dr. Chapman collected his extensive quantitative data in 1986 from five informants using a series of free story interviews. The similarities in our results were interesting, but the differences were striking, especially as they related to motives for re-entry. Neither set of results totally supported findings in the adult or continuing education literature.

When analyzing the results of my earlier research (Thompson, 1987), it seemed obvious that some concepts were probably too complex for a self-

administered questionnaire consisting only of closed-ended items. Added to this was the fact that some of my concepts were incompletely developed. I concluded that open ended questions for some items would avoid provoking resistance (as did the label "mature student") or avoid suppression of individual views which did not coincide with my own world view (my central life interest is occupational). At the same time, I felt that Dr. Chapman's approach of free stories did not provide enough structure to perform even the limited statistical manipulations possible with a small sample.

I therefore concluded that for future research, a semi-structured personal interview would be the most appropriate mode of data collection to address these concerns. This mode included closed-ended questions which are appropriate for probing salience of items, and open-ended questions which are powerful under conditions that require probing of attitudes and ascertaining information that is interlocked in a social system or personality structure (Miller, 1977:83). At the design stage, the complexity of many of the items and the probable length of the interview ruled out telephone interviews. Miller (1977) suggests that the maximum length for telephone interviews is 20-25 minutes.

One of the important advantages of the face-of-face mode of data collection is that the interviewer can collect supplementary information about the informant's personal characteristics and [sometimes] environment which may be valuable in interpreting results. Another advantage is that the interviewer may obtain spontaneous answers which would be unavailable from a written, self-administered

instrument, and hence can investigate more complex concepts. Finally, the personal interview encourages the informant to become oriented to the topic under discussion and facilitates recall.

A major disadvantage to personal inteviews is that the human interaction may distort information gathered; where more than one interviewer is collecting data, there may be problems with between-interviewer reliability, and there are limitations imposed on analysis. However, given the fact that all interviews were conducted by the author, and given the limitations of the alternatives of either free story phenomonology or forced-answer self-administered questionnaires, these disadvantages were judged to be acceptable.

2. Instrument testing and application

A pre-test of the proposed research questionnaire was conducted in May of 1988 using a convenience sample of seven nontraditional students. Four of these were students at the University of Lethbridge students and were known by the author personally from my own tenure as a nontraditional student at that university which ended in 1987. Three Lethbridge Community College students were selected on the basis of referral from the four University of Lethbridge students.

On the basis of the pre-test, it was clearly evident that some of the closed-ended items were still forcing answers in certain directions, given the high occurrence of responses which fell into "other" categories. It was also evident that pretest informants were keenly interested in the topics being discussed from their frequent resistance to closing

discussion of one item and moving on to new items. Further, they were quite willing to tolerate interviews longer than 60 minutes. Consequently, the interview schedule was modified to transform several of the semi-structured questions into completely open-ended items, even though the resulting interview would take longer to conduct than the 45-60 minute session which is typically recommended (Miller, 1977:83).

Data were then gathered using the reformulated interview schedule. Interviews were conducted by the author with 49 informants living within a 100 kilometer radius of the two educating institutions. All interviews were conducted by the author during the Summer and early Fall of 1988. Informants had the choice of interview site. About half chose their own homes and the other half found it more convenient to be interviewed on campus in lounges or cafeterias. The median length of interview was 86 minutes, during which 96 questions were administered. Questions were both open-ended and closed-ended with corraborating probes incorporated.

**D. Limitations to data gathering**

The first step in the process of securing interviews involved mailing a letter requesting an interview. As such, the initial step was subject to the problems associated with mailed surveys, including early response bias and non-response (Fowler, 1984:87). However, no follow-up mailing was needed given that the initial response was above the 50 per cent return level set as the minimum criterion for analysis. An initial concern about scheduling interviews during a busy time such as mid-

terms or towards the end of a semester proved unfounded; no resistence was encountered to scheduling interviews at these junctures.

There are certain limitations inherent to using the official student records of a community college or university, one of which is that outside researchers must guarantee complete anonimity of informants. No special coding allowing the researcher to identify a particular informant is permitted, and no re-contact of the informant is permitted under any circumstances. Therefore for this research all records pertaining to informant identity were required by the institutions to be destroyed in the presence of the informant at the time of the interview. This precluded clarification of any responses at a later date. Tape recorded backup data collection was not excluded by the institutions, but informants were generally either unwilling or anxious about this technique at the pre-test stage and in the first four regular interviews. Thereafter, the tape recorder was not used.

**E. Strategy for analysis**

Two types of analyses are appropriate for the small sample produced by this research: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Use of inferential statistics on a small sample size such as the one obtained by this research is cautioned because it is technically non-random. Correlations may be relevant at $p<.1$. A sample size of at least 600 informants would be necessary to ensure randomness according to Agresti and Finlay (1986:107). Therefore, where statistics are cited in Chapters IV (Analysis of Data) and V (Interpretation of Data Analysis),

the reader will wish to remember that such statistics should only be seen as having suggested significance.

The opportunities for analysis are narrowed because data for comparative purposes was not collected on three other groups of postsecondary students present at both the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Community College : traditional students aged 18-24, part-time nontraditional students in [main-track] education and adult students in [specially organized] adult education.

# CHAPTER IV

# ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter, the data are reported first for the entire sample and then by gender and age groups for dependent variables associated with hypotheses 4, 5 and 6. Reference is made where appropriate to corresponding items on the research instrument, which is contained in Appendix 1. The interpretation of these findings is found in Chapter V (Interpretation of Data Analysis), which also assesses the outcomes of testing the six hypotheses stated in Chapter II (Literature Review and Hypotheses).

## A. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

Forty-three per cent of the informants (21 students) were attending the University of Lethbridge, while the remaining 57 per cent (28 students) were attending Lethbridge Community College. The reasons informants gave for not continuing their education sequentially in the traditional pattern were reported as follows: found a good job (27%), marriage (29%), effects of violence or substance abuse in family of origin (18%), discouragement by family of origin (4%), did not think it was necessary (12%) and did not feel capable (10%)

There were 16 males and 33 females in the sample. The mean age of informants was 36 years with a range of 27 to 55. The modal age was 29. The sample had the following distribution when arranged in five-year periods:

Table 1
Distribution of Sample by Age Group

| age | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| 25-30 | 11 | 23 |
| 31-35 | 10 | 20 |
| 36-40 | 11 | 23 |
| 41-45 | 9 | 18 |
| 46-50 | 7 | 14 |
| 51-55 | 1 | 2 |
| | 49 | 100 |

Twenty-eight informants (57%) resided in the City of Lethbridge, while 13 informants (27%) resided in a town or hamlet within the trading region and eight informants (16%) lived on farms. Six of the nontraditional students were Native (12%) while 43 informants were non-native (88%). The following general characteristics describe the sample:

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

| characteristic | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| Marital status | | |
| married or equivalent | 24 | 49 |
| divorced, separated or widowed | 18 | 37 |
| never married | 7 | 14 |
| | | |
| Households with children | 31 | 63 |
| Households with 1 child | 13 | 44 |
| Households with 2 children | 6 | 21 |
| Households with 3 children | 8 | 22 |
| Average children/household | 1.6 | |
| Median age of children | | 12.41 years |

As employed here, the concept of "household" is equivalent to the definition of "family" used by Statistics Canada(1988:5-15)): a group of individuals including adults (who may or may not be married) who share a common dwelling and who form an economic unit. Three was the maximum number of children reported in a household. The modes of child care care reported were, in order of frequency: self-care by the child (38%), schedule juggling by the nontraditional student (31%), a family member living in the household (26%) and paid day care (4.%). Of the 24 informants who had spouses or spouse-equivalents, 71% (17 spouses) were employed for wages full-time, 12% (3 people) were employed for wages part-time) and 16 % (4 people) were housepersons.

The distribution of mean educational attainment of informants was 35 people (71%) with high school matriculation and 19 people (17%) with incomplete highschool. The mean educational attainment of the spouses or spouse-equivalents was some or complete postsecondary training (13 people or 54.%). There were eight spouses or spouse equivalents with high school completion (33%) and three (13%) with less than grade 12.

In these data, "pretax income" is defined as in official government statistics as money income received from all sources, before deductions. Deductions from this income include such items as taxes, pension contributions and insurance premiums. Pretax income may be composed of wages and salaries, net income from self-employment, investment income, government transfer payments and alimony (Statistics Canada, 1988:5-15). The median annual pretax family

income before re-entry was in the range of $20001 to $25000, while after re-entry it diminished to an average range of $10001 to $15000. Prior to enrolment, 49% earned $25,000 or more, while after enrolment, only 23% remained in that category. The following distributions were found:

Table 3
Distribution of Annual Family Pretax Incomes

| before re-entry | | | after re-entry | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| range | n | per cent | range | n | per cent |
| under $10000 | 3 | 6 | under $10000 | 6 | 12 |
| $10001-15000 | 5 | 10 | $10001-15000 | 20 | 41 |
| $15001-20000 | 11 | 23 | $15001-20000 | 6 | 12 |
| $20001-25000 | 6 | 12 | $20001-25000 | 6 | 12 |
| $25001-30000 | 6 | 12 | $25001-30000 | 4 | 8 |
| $30001-35000 | 7 | 14 | $30001-35000 | 3 | 6 |
| $35001-40000 | 4 | 8 | $35001-40000 | 2 | 4 |
| $40001-45000 | 4 | 8 | $40001-45000 | 0 | 0 |
| $45001-50000 | 1 | 2 | $45001-50000 | 0 | 0 |
| $50001-55000 | 1 | 2 | $50001-55000 | 1 | 2 |
| over $55001 | 1 | 2 | over $55001 | 1 | 2 |
| | 49 | 100 | | 49 | 100 |

Regular non-student activities involving more than three hours per week of the informant's time were investigated to obtain an approximation of the nontraditional student's constellation of roles. The median number of non-student roles occupied concomitantly with the nontraditional student role was 2.3 per student, with the most common non-student roles being those associated with the family. Table 4 reports the complete range and frequency of non-student roles.

Table 4
Non-student Roles Occupied on a Regular Basis
for Three or More Hours per Week

| Activity | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| parenting | 31 | 63 |
| spouse or equivalent | 24 | 49 |
| volunteer work | 20 | 41 |
| part-time paid work | 19 | 39 |
| recreation or hobby | 10 | 20 |
| other care-giving | 4 | 8 |

Sixteen informants (33%) reported having been unable to attend class at least once during the preceding semester to attend to the needs of a child, spouse or parent who was ill or to attend to some other form of personal difficulty, such as a custody dispute.

**B. Occupational experience**

Most informants (84% or 41 people) were employed full-time before returning to learning. The 1981 Blishen occupational ranking scale (Blishen, et.al., 1987), showed that the average occupational ranking was 27.31, which encompasses occupations such as teller, retail clerk, assembly line worker or mechanic. Table 5 reports that 85 per cent of the informants were in clerical or manual occupations. at the sub-management level, while an additional 5 per cent held supervisory positions. Spouses or spouse equivalents of informants had a similar average profile. The following profile of informant's occupation before re-entry emerges:

Table 5
Distribution of Occupations Before Re-entry

| Blishen Index | n | per cent | typical occupations |
|---|---|---|---|
| below 30.99 | 16 | 39 | retail clerk, agricultural |
| 31.00 - 3599 | 13 | 31 | assembly line, nurse aid |
| 36.00 - 45.99 | 6 | 15 | teller, retail manager, writer |
| 46.00 - 55.99 | 2 | 5 | accountant, office manager |
| 56.00 - 65.99 | 4 | 10 | teacher, social worker |
| 66.00 and over | 0 | 0 | physician, lawyer, professor |
| | 41 | 100 | |

Quality of job experience was investigated in questions 26, 27 and 28. Some level of job dissatisfaction was reported by 58% of the informants, chiefly because of interpersonal relationships (co-workers or supervisors). Thirty-six informants (74%) perceived they had experienced credential barriers in some form, the most frequent being denial of access to a desire job (56%) or a promotion (44%). Two types of reactions to the credential barriers were found: anger or annoyance with the system (44% or 17 people), and anger or annoyance with self (56% or 22 people). Women accounted for 82% of those who expressed inwardly-directed annoyance or anger at the experience.

**C. The re-entry decision**

The answers to item 43 on the interview schedule yielded the information that the notion to return to learning was an idea of long-standing for most informants (86% or 42 students). In the 24 months prior to enrollment, some sort of event seen by informants as being non-routine and a significant influence of re-rentry was reported by 84% of the sample (41 students). The distribution of types of these trigger events was as follows:

Table 6
Distribution of Types of Trigger Events
in the 24 Months Before Re-entry

| Event | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| major | | |
| loss of spouse | 12 | 30 |
| loss of employment | 11 | 27 |
| health or personal problems | 6 | 15 |
| | 29 | 71 |
| minor | | |
| vocational counseling | 4 | 10 |
| inheritance | 3 | 7 |
| significant other re-entry* | 3 | 7 |
| migration | 2 | 4 |
| | 12 | 29 |
| | 41 | 100 |

* significant other enrolment in some form of adult education

With reference to Bandura's (1977) general observation that events triggering significant departures of direction from previous life paths may be of major or minor magnitude, the events reported can be classified in two categories. Loss of spouse, loss of employment and health or personal problems might be classified as trigger events associated with catastrophic role-loss events, while the remaining four items are more benign. Using these categories, most informants reporting a trigger event experienced major events in which some gender or age normative role was removed.

The most common cognitive response to the trigger event reported in question 46 was the taking of personal stock: 69% reported going through a review of priorities and subsequent reordering of what is

perceived to be important in life. Fifty-five percent (22 people) who went through the life-space review rated it as very important or somewhat important with regard to their re-entry decision, while 33% (13 people) regarded the experience as neutral and 12% (5 people) regarded it as having little or no influence. Despite the stressful nature of most trigger events, 59% of the informants saw the ultimate outcome as positive or liberating, either emotionally or financially (questions 46B).

Forty-three informants (88%) had a specific occupational destination in mind. Utilizing the 1981 Blishen occupational ranking scale (Blishen, et.al., 1987), most informants had as a target occupation with an average Blishen ranking of 55.00; a considerably higher ranking than the average previous occupation shown on Table 5. Table 7 reports the profile of desired future occupations:

Table 7
Distribution of Preferred Future Occupations

| Blishen Index | n | per cent | typical occupations |
|---|---|---|---|
| below 30.99 | 0 | 0 | retail clerk, agricult. worker |
| 31.00 - 35.99 | 4 | 10 | assembly line, nurse aid |
| 36.00 - 45.99 | 5 | 12 | teller, retail manager, writer |
| 46.00 - 55.99 | 18 | 42 | accountant, office manager |
| 56.00 - 65.99 | 9 | 21 | teacher, social worker |
| 66.00 and over | 7 | 16 | physician, lawyer, professor |
| | 43 | 100 | |

The data relating to interest in obtaining new education first yielded the information that all of the informants had more than one motive for re-entry. Informants were asked to state which of several alternatives was

most important for their decision to re-enter. Table 8 represents the distribution of first choices behind reasons for re-entry.

Table 8
Distribution of First Choices
of Motives for Re-entry

| item | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. employment conditions* | 16 | 33 |
| 2. employment availability | 9 | 18 |
| 3. personal fulfillment | 7 | 14 |
| 4. wages or salary | 6 | 12 |
| 5. community contribution | 4 | 8 |
| 6. personal interest | 3 | 6 |
| 7. employment status | 2 | 4 |
| 8. to please others | 1 | 2 |
| | 49 | 100 |

*While employment conditions may seem intrinsic to employment, answers placed in this category were those which clearly had an orientation to non-work roles. Thus, informants might respond that flexible working hours were important so that family responsibilities could be met, or that the workplace be close to home for the same reason.

These data can be grouped into two dichtomous variables to test the propositions of Aslanian and Brickell (1980), Cross ((1984) and Campbell (1984) that employment-related reasons will be the primary re-entry motives. Table 9 displays this distribution, accomplished by recoding the eight items in Table 8 into employment-related motives with a value of 1 (items 1,2,3 and 7) and non-employment-related motives with a value of 2 (items 4,5,6, and 8).

Table 9
Source of Primary Interest for Re-Entry
Using the Employment Model

| locus | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| employment-related motives | 32 | 65 |
| non-employment-related motives | 17 | 35 |
| | 49 | 100 |

From this table, it would seem that informants clearly rate employment-related reasons for re-entry highest, upholding the premises of Aslanian and Brickell (1980), Cross (1984) and Campbell (1984). These data, however, can be regrouped in another way for further testing. By conceptualizing the first item (conditions of employment) as *extrinsic* to employment because answers in this category were oriented chiefly to non-work interests, the item can be grouped with items 3,5,6 and 8 which are also extrinsic to employment. This way of grouping the motives would be consistent with the concept of Central Life Interests as proposed by Dubin, et.al. (1976). Table 10 represents this second regrouping of items.

Table 10
Source of Primary Interest for Re-Entry
Using the Central Life Interests Model

| locus | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| intrinsic to employment | 16 | 33 |
| extrinsic to employment | 33 | 67 |
| | 49 | 100 |

These results appear to show that non-work central life interests are dominant, therefore lending support to the premises of Burgess (1977), [partially] Morstain and Smart (1974) and Chapman (1986) that re-entry will often be energized by non-occupational interests.

Question 57 probed saliency in another way with an unstructured question asking the informant to state the reason for returning seen as most important. This question was included in an attempt to confirm which group of items included in Table 8 were seen as most influential, and coincidentally to retest the two regrouped models. The results showed that 19 students (39%) rated economic motivations as more salient while 30 students (61%) rated non-economic motivations as more salient.

As reported above, multiple motives for re-entry were expressed by all informants. The *degree of importance* of reasons for wanting new learning was investigated. Questions 47 through 56 offered informants several reasons for returning to learning, which they were asked to rate in terms of importance to their decision. The items rated as most important were the desire to learn new occupational skills (rated as very important by 38 people-79%), frustration with existing occupation (rated as very important by 28 people-68.29%) and the desire to explore one's own personal potential (rated as very important by 92%-45 people).

**D. Satisfactions and difficulties of re-entry**

1. Socialization to the student role. Questions 65 through 70 investigated several elements of campus life associated the first weeks of re-entry. The initial socialization situation of 49% of the re-entrants (24 informants) was that they knew nobody on campus, while 33% (16 informants) had a friend, acquaintance or child who was already a student on the same campus, 10% (5 informants) entered at the same time as a friend or acquaintance and 8% (4 informants) knew an instructor or counselor on the campus. Four students (8%) made an informal exploratory visit before starting classes, while 12 students (25%) attended an orientation session for new students.

With regard to adjusting to their new roles, most students had little difficulty finding their way around campus; 32 informants rated the experience as very easy or somewhat easy. Over sixty-nine per cent of the students (34 informants) reported the re-acquisition of study skills was very difficult or somewhat difficult. Time management proved troublesome for 33 informants (67%), of whom the majority (23 informants) reported moderate difficulty. Managing test anxiety was a source of difficulty for 27 informants (55%), of whom 22 informants reported a high degree of difficulty with this central aspect of the student role.

With regard to the student's experience with various aspects of the academic services and the classroom delivery of education, difficulties with obtaining advice on academic and other issues related to the student role was reported as very troublesome or moderately

troublesome by 21 informants (43%). Getting along with instructors was reported as a problem by 11 informants (22%). Whether or not students considered these human aspects a problem, 12 informants (24%) said that they could recall at least one experience with an instructor they perceived to be hostile to nontraditional students, while 19 informants (39%) reported at least one experience with advisors or registration personnel perceived to be unsympathetic to nontraditional students. With regard to nonhuman aspects of the delivery system, the prescriptive nature of programs was regarded as very troublesome or somewhat troublesome by 16 informants (33%). Intake routines (registration) were seen as troublesome by 12 informants (25%), while 23 informants (47%) believed the student loan system discriminated against nontraditional students.

Although institutional arrangements of a non-academic nature were not rated as the most important difficulties of being a student, a distinct pattern of dissatisfaction relating to three of these components emerged according to which of the two institutions the informant was attending, as seen in Table 11. Questions 89 through 92 investigated the sources of these difficulties.

University of Lethbridge students were more likely to be dissatisfied with academic counselors, whom they often perceived as being indifferent to the extra demands of multiple roles upon nontraditional students. Informants attending Lethbridge Community College were more likely to be dissatisfied with block programming, the inflexibility of which they felt made coping with multiple roles more difficult.

Table 11
Reactions of Informants
to Institutional Arrangements

| | College satisfied | not | University satisfied | not |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic counseling | 23 (82%) | 5 (18%) | 5 (24%) | 16 (77%) |
| Prescriptive programs | 15 (54%) | 13 (46%) | 18 (86%) | 3 (14%) |
| Registration routines | 23 (82%) | 5 (18%) | 14 (67%) | 7 (33%) |

2. Integrating the student role into the role set.

Questions 71 through 76 investigated several elements associated with integrating the student role into existing adult roles. Transportation proved to be of little difficulty: 39 students (76%) did not rate getting to and from campus as a problem. Of the 31 students who had children living in the household, child care presented a difficulty for 8 informants (26%), and was regarded neutrally or as not difficult by 23 informants (74%). Finding time for personal leisure activities was difficult for 38 informants (78%). Finding time for family activities was a problem for 31 informants (63%). Significant financial hardship was reported by 13 informants (27%), moderate financial hardship was reported by 7 informants (14%) while no financial hardship was reported by 29 informants (59%). Difficulties with housekeeping were described by 15 informants (3%).

There were three informants who could not identify any source of dissatisfaction associated with their re-entry, 11 informants who described one major source and 35 informants (71%) who identified more than one source. The mean number of sources of dissatisfaction rated as important reported was 2.14. Tabel 12 reports the frequencies of the sources of difficulties, the following pattern emerges:

Table 12
Sources of Difficulties Associated with
Re-entry Reported as Most Important

| type of difficulty | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| multiple role time management | 23 | 47 |
| financial sacrifices of family | 10 | 20 |
| activity sacrifices of family | 9 | 18 |
| institutional requirements (non-academic) | 7 | 14 |
| | 49 | 100 |

Questions 77 through 82 investigated the reactions of significant others to the student's re-entry. Such reactions were noted in the literature as significantly contributory to the nontraditional student's ability to integrate student and non-student roles. When a student feels isolated or beseiged by significant others who are non-supportive, this can become a substantial barrier to continuance and to academic achievement. Conversely, support from significant others emotionally, financially and with family role work sharing can significantly enhance the new learning experience (Kirk and Dorfman, 1983; Skelhorne, 1975). Significant other support is essential to coping successfully with major life transitions (Lowenthal, et.al., 1975).

The informant's reports of the reaction of various significant others to re-entry formed the patterns reported in Table 13. In this table positive reactions were indications of support for the nontraditional student, negative reactions were indications of non-support ranging from concern to disapproval and ambivalent reactions were mixtures of both positive and negative reactions.

Table 13
Reactions of Significant Others to Re-Entry

| significant other | reaction | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|---|
| spouse or equivalent | positive | 16 | 67 |
| | negative | 4 | 17 |
| | ambivalent | 4 | 17 |
| | | 24 | 100 |
| children | positive | 19 | 61 |
| | negative | 0 | |
| | ambivalent | 12 | 39 |
| | | 31 | 100 |
| female parent | positive | 20 | 65 |
| | negative | 5 | 16 |
| | ambivalent | 6 | 19 |
| | | 31 | 100 |
| male parent | positive | 16 | 52 |
| | negative | 7 | 23 |
| | ambivalent | 8 | 22 |
| | | 31 | 100 |
| siblings | positive | 25 | 58 |
| | negative | 4 | 9 |
| | ambivalent | 14 | 33 |
| | | 43 | 100 |

On balance, nontraditional students in this sample did not feel themselves to be disadvantaged in the academic role in comparison to their younger counterparts. According to their answers to question 88, eight informants (16%) felt that their younger counterparts had an advantage conferred by more current study skills or better memorization abilities. The remaining 41 informants (84%) however, felt that their age and experience conferred important advantages. Table 14 reports the distribution of the advantages perceived by informants.

Table 14
Perceptions of Informants of Their Advantages Over Traditional Students in the Academic Setting

| perceived advantage | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| better self-discipline | 16 | 33 |
| practical experience to anchor new learning | 8 | 16 |
| more knowledgeable about complex systems | 4 | 8 |
| more goal-oriented | 11 | 22 |
| no advantage | 8 | 16 |
| | 49 | 100 |

Table 15 indicates reports all informants could identify at least one source of satisfaction associated with their re-entry, and 37 informants (75%) could identify more than one sources. The mean number of sources of satisfaction rated as important reported was 1.5. As reported earlier, multiple sources of difficulty averaged 2.14 per informant; a higher number than sources of satisfaction. Sources of satisfaction fell into two broad groups: occupational and non-occupational. Similar to

the data reported in Table 8 (Distribution of Choices of Motives for Re-entry) and the two subsequent recodings in Table 9 (Source of Primary Interest for Re-Entry Using the Employment Model) and Table 10 (Source of Primary Interest for Re-Entry Using the Central Life Interests Model), "occupational" satisfaction probably contains certain factors which are actually extrinsic to occupation.

Table 15
Sources of Satisfaction Associated with
Re-entry Reported as Most Important

| type of satisfaction | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| progress towards desired occupation | 20 | 40 |
| sense of personal achievement | 25 | 51 |
| recognition of signicant others | 4 | 10 |
| | 49 | 100 |

Item 96 asked informants to choose what they felt would be the most significant outcome of their new learning when course work was completed and the degree or diploma earned, 31 people (63%) stated that self-realization would be the most important product, while 18 people (37%) reported that occupational access for economic reasons would be the most important.

Question 95 asked informants to state how they felt about their present lives. Table 16 reports the pattern which emerged with regard to the present life of the informant, in which the nontraditional student role was usually part of a role constellation involving one or more adult roles.

Table 16
Overall Rating of Present Life

| rating | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| highly satisfactory | 34 | 69 |
| somewhat satisfactory | 12 | 25 |
| neither satisfactor nor unsatisfactory | 1 | 2 |
| somewhat unsatisfactory | 2 | 4 |
| | 49 | 100 |

When asked to consider how their present lives compared with their lives before re-entry, informants provided the following information:

Table 17
Overall Rating of Present Life
Compared to Life Before Returning to Learning

| rating | n | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| much happier than before | 37 | 76 |
| somewhat happier than before | 11 | 22 |
| the same as before | 1 | 2 |
| | 49 | 100 |

**E. Influence of gender**

Female informants outnumbered male informants 33 to 16; a ratio similar to the nontraditional student populations in the two institutions. This, it has been noted elsewhere in this document, is the reverse of the gender mix of traditional students where males outnumber females. Given that gender inequality is a prominent feature of our society, there is limited utility in replicating from this data certain propositions that are already well-documented. These include occupational inequality and income inequality.

There were two findings of this study which relate more specifically to gender differences found in other studies of nontraditional students or adults in education. These findings held for University of Lethebridge informants as well as those attending Lethbridge Community College. First was the finding that men in the sample were more likely to undertake heavier course loads than were the women, as was found in my earlier study (Thompson, 1987). This circumstance was largely due to the heavier care-giver role requirements of women. Second was that choices of future occupations commonly fell along typical gender lines. As found in my earlier study (Thompson, 1987) and that of Holland (1985), women in the sample were likely to choose occupations typically thought of as "female" domains (teacher, social worker, childcare worker, nurse) while male informants were likely to choose occupations typically thought of as "male" domains (lawyer, physician, business administrator, forester, electronics technician).

The foregoing, however, fell outside the hypotheses designed to test fo. non-economic differences. (hypotheses 4, 5 and 6). In order to discover the effects of controlling for informant's gender on selected dependent variables, several items offering a five-value scale matrix ranging from very imporant to not important at all were recoded into dichotomous variables. The value of 1 was assigned to "important" ratings and the value of 2 was assigned to neutral and "not important" ratings. The items selected were from those variables associated with hypotheses 4, 5 and 6. The relationships are summarized in the Table 18 table

according to the strength of their correlations with the independent variables (the decision to re-enter and post-re-entry experiences).

Table 18
Effects of Informant's Gender on
Selected Dependent Variables

| Item | Correlation | probability |
|---|---|---|
| Sources of interest in returning | | |
| wanted new knowledge- | -.046 | .5446 |
| wanted new occupational skills | .-.119 | .4143 |
| contribute to community | -.016 | .9127 |
| frustrated with existing job | .233 | .1068 |
| bored with home routine | -.418 | .0028* |
| felt left behind by family | -2.95 | .0394* |
| explore personal potential | .144 | .3248 |
| wanted to meet new people | -.313 | 0108* |
| Difficulties with re-entry | | |
| multiple role time management | -.151 | .2991 |
| examination anxiety | -.138 | .3457 |
| getting official advice | .217 | .134 |
| getting along with instructors | -.246 | .0879* |
| leisure activities | -.136 | .3531 |
| family activities | -.331 | .6011 |
| financial management | -.26 | .0711* |
| institutional requirements | .0911 | .5342 |
| Satisfactions of re-entry | | |
| progress towards target occupation | .099 | .4982 |
| sense of personal achievement | .101 | .492 |
| recognition from significant others | .274 | .0571* |

* p<.1

As a general statement, it can be said that the effects of gender were generally weak and somewhat inconsistent on the variables tested. Of

the 20 items included for investigation, 12 of them were negatively correlated with being a female nontraditional student and 10 of them were positively correlated with being a female nontraditional student. However, among the seven items that were statistically significant at p=<.1 (the criterion set out in Chapter III), five of these were negatively correlated with being a female nontraditional student.

Although only two of the women interviewed fit the profile of bored middleclass housewives (women seeking diversion, with professional husbands and paid in-home help), many of the women expressed dissatisfaction with their home routines and felt the need to expand their horizons. One of these women and one other talked about experiencing empty nest syndrome, in which women are distressed by the loss of their nurturing roles when maturing children become more independent. However, other women were more likely to feel left behind as the formal education of their children increased, or if a spouse had returned to learning (currently or in the recent past).

The multiple role conditions associated with re-entry were clearly more difficult for the female nontraditional students in this sample than for their male counterparts. Included in this sample were students who were presently married or cohabiting (24 respondents), students who had children living apart by reason of divorce or children grown (13 respondents), and students who were caregivers for grandchildren, siblings or parents (3 respondents).

The reactions of spouses to the informant's return to learning, argued in the literature to be the most influential among reactions of significant others, were reported in Table 13. Further information is found in Table 19 as follows:

Table 19
Spouse's Reaction to the Decision to Return to Learning, by Gender

| | Informant's gender | |
|---|---|---|
| | male | female |
| typical spouse reaction | | |
| favourable | 9 (100%) | 7 (47%) |
| ambivalent | 0 | 8 (53%) |
| | 9 (100%) | 15 (100%) |

p=.0001
Contingency coefficient .549

Spouses of male nontraditional students were universally supportive of the student's entry into postsecondary learning. Spouses of female students were about equally likely to be supportive or ambivalent. Ambivalence had two patterns: initial approval of the female spouse's new student role followed by withdrawal of approval because the non-student spouse needed to make personal sacrifices (five spouses), or approval of the student's decision coupled with concern about pressures on her due to the student role (three spouses).

**F. Influence of age**

To investigate the effects of controlling for informant's age on selected dependent variables, items offering a five-value scale matrix ranging

from very imporant (1) to not important at all (5) were recoded into dichotomous variables. The value of 1 was assigned to "important" ratings and the value of 2 was assigned to neutral and "not important" ratings. The items selected were those associated with hypotheses 4, 5 and 6. The results of correlating these dichotomized variables with age are seen in Table 20.

Table 20
Effects of Informant's Age on
Selected Dependent Variables

| Item | Correlation | probability |
|---|---|---|
| Sources of interest in returning | | |
| wanted new knowledge | .089 | .5446 |
| wanted new occupational skills | .278 | .385 |
| contribute to community | .145 | .3209 |
| frustrated with existing job | .094 | .5228 |
| felt left behind by family | .087 | .5542 |
| explore personal potential | -.241 | .0949* |
| wanted to meet new people | -.354 | .0126* |
| personal pride in credential | -.166 | .2535 |
| Difficulties with re-entry | | |
| multiple role time management | -.038 | .067* |
| examination anxiety | -.039 | .7975 |
| getting official advice | .063 | .6687 |
| getting along with instructors | -.179 | .2186 |
| leisure activities | .084 | .5662 |
| family activities | -.077 | .6011 |
| financial management | .057 | .6984 |
| institutional requirements | .132 | .3647 |
| Satisfactions of re-entry | | |
| progress towards target occupation | -.169 | .0615* |
| sense of personal achievement | .067 | .6459 |
| recognition from significant others | .016 | .9142 |

*p=<.1

As with the informant's gender, the ages of the people in this sample produced generally weak variances with inconsistent directions. As the age of sample members increased, they were more interested in practical aspects of new learning than in exploring their human potential. Older informants were more likely to experience difficulties with many aspects of being a nontraditional student, including getting along with instructors. Table 21 shows such difficulties when the sample is dichotomized into two groups: those aged under 36 and 36 and over. (This particular age division was suggested by mean of the sample and by the literature).

Table 21
Difficulty in Interacting with
Academic Instructors by Age of Informant

| | Informant's age group | |
|---|---|---|
| | to age 36 | age 36 and over |
| Difficulty | | |
| Yes | 2 (9%) | 10(39%) |
| No | 21 (91%) | 16 (61%) |
| | 23 (100%) | 26 (100%) |

Even though the effect is weak, it is apparent that the older men and women in this sample tended to have more difficulty interacting with instructors. If the sample is divided at age 30, where there are 11 informants 30 or under and 38 informants over age 30, the effect disappears for the younger age group (no reports of difficulties) and weakens for older students (12 reports of difficulty, or 31%). If the sample is divided at age 40, the effect is somewhat stronger. Divided this way, there were 32 informants age 40 or under and 17 people over age

40, of whom 8 people (47%) in the latter group report difficulties interacting with instructors. Thus, with increasing age comes increasing difficulty negotiating a comfortable relationship with instructors.

# CHAPTER V

# INTERPRETATION OF DATA ANALYSIS

The task of this chapter is threefold: to interpret the data presented in Chapter IV with reference to the literature review, to discuss where there may be difficulties in the literature for describing this sample and to assess which of the six hypotheses are supported and which are not. Chapter VI (Summary and Conclusions) will then summarize the findings of this study, and attempt to discuss their relevance to the research questions and sociological problem stated in Chapter I (The Sociological Problem).

## A. The decision-making process leading to re-entry

1. Re-entry schema

According to the answers to question 43, over eight-five per cent of the sample reported that they harboured the idea of going back to school for years prior to actual re-entry. Over half of the informants in this group estimated that they thought about re-entry frequently (at least once a week). However, this is not surprising because of the importance of academic credentials for social, economic and political success as suggested by Collins (1979), Brym (1986), Forcese (1986) and others. Thus, most adults in North America probably have a generalized desire to obtain more formal education unless they have already achieved the highest scholarly training.

However, many of these informants had mental "pictures" of themselves going back to formal learning. It might be speculated that

these particular informants had what amounts to a re-entry schema. The concept of a schema is used here as proposed by Markus and Zajonc (1985:145, 158) to function as an interpretive framework which influences evaluations, judgments, predictions and inferences, and ultimately overt behavior. These schema involving visualizing oneself as a participant in higher education may represent what Taylor et. al. (1978) refer to as a role schema. It is this type of visualization reported by informant #7, who said "*When business was slow and I had time to let my mind wander, I pictured myself being there [the campus]... being part of everything* ."

2. Trigger event.

The presence of such a schema among informants, however, often did not seem to elicit action until a precipitating event occured. The high rate of reporting of a trigger event in the lives of nontraditional students in this sample within the two years preceding re-entry supports the first hypothesis and upholds the findings of Aslanian and Brickell (1980). Extending Festinger (1957), one explanation for the fact that the schema may be present but not acted upon may be that the student role is not part of the typical adult role constellation, and is resisted because of its incongruence. Re-entry remains a latent life path option until such time as events in the informant's life may precipitate a role transition. Not all precipitating events which can reasonably be linked to re-entry took place within the preceding two years however. Informant #23, widowed eight years earlier and left to raise a young child, reported making the decision to return to learning within a year of the event. But acting upon this decision took several more years, during which

time the informant felt the need to adjust to the role of single parent and being "*one in a world of two* " before tackling re-entry.

As Bandura (1977) suggests, one response to unforseeable events may be to reorient one's values and personal standards. Hence one's cognitions about the perceived incongruity of roles, usually expressed as insurmountable barriers of time and money, may change. Informant #1 said: "*I went through the admission routine twice before in the last ten years, but I always had some excuse why I couldn't register for classes. One day I was suddenly out of a job, and it was either go to school or move to another city ....so off I went to school .*" Informant #48 recalled that "*I wanted to go to school for years, but until I became suddenly single, I didn't do a thing about it .*" Thus, it appears that for these informants, the reorientation may in part conform to Hewitt's (1984) proposition that people come to view alternatives differently according to their own ability to perform in some other role. If a socially valued role such as worker or spouse becomes inaccessible, it is likely that another socially valued role (or a transitional role leading to a socially valued role) will be sought to replace it.

The answers to question 46 indicated that over half the sample who experience trigger events that are generally viewed as catastrohpic or near-catastrophic came ultimately to view the event as liberating (positive). This finding is consistent with similar findings of deCharms and Muir (1978). Intuitively, it would seem that such a finding is more likely to apply to women, who typically experience less freedom of action and choice throughout their lives (Voydanoff, 1984). Informant #3, a

woman, observed that "... *the [event] was a terrible blow, but in the end it was my ticket to freedom* .". While it is true that women in the sample were more likely than their male counterparts to have this reaction (12 women and 10 men), these differences were not statistically significant. This might in part be due to the effect of occupational malaise reported by 28 informants, or to the fact that 11 informants reported loss of employment as the trigger event precipitating re-entry. Under these circumstances, a rather radical change of direction may have either a re-energizing or calming effect. The fact of taking action is important for the self-esteem of those who have lost employment (Voydanoff, 1984). Indeed, Informant #9 claimed that "*starting university saved my sanity after being suddenly removed from a job that I had given my heart and soul to for years* ."

3. Changes to life perspective.

The changed perspective on one's life seems to be partly associated for some informants with a sense that time is fleeting, as suggested by Neugarten (1969) and Dion (1985). As seen by their answers to questions 83 and 84, for many informants the subjective notion of limited personal time *left* was associated with what could best be described as a major unanticipated departure from the traditionally sequenced roles of adulthood (worker or spouse). The decision to attend full-time to "*get it over with before I'm collecting Canada Pension* " was salient for divorced 43-year old Informant #28, who felt that "*...somebody changed the world while I was asleep [in my marriage]* . " For others, the less dramatic acquisition of a new role in normative sequence was traumatic: Informant #18 reported experiencing a

"*grand anxiety attack at the prospect of becoming a grandparent* " which lead to taking up the student role, a role more associated with youth. "*Like the commercial on TV says, no way I'm growing old without a fight* ." declared this Informant. Informant #23, who voluntarily left a well-paying but otherwise unrewarding semi-professional job offered the poignant observation that "*I'll just be starting my new career when my friends are taking early retirement* ."

While my first hypothesis that the decision to re-enter non-compulsory institutional education will be positively associated with the presence of a triggering event in the life of the informants in the immediate past is upheld, this hypothesis seems too broad. It requires that subsidiary propositions be set out: that the triggering event is positively associated with an evaluation of the present life-space; and that the re-evaluation of the present life space is negatively associated with non-action (maintaining the status quo ) and positively associated with action (re-entry).

**B. Motives for Re-entry**

1. Multiple motives.

While there is no consensus in the literature about whether the primary motives for participation are occupational or for personal growth, there is general agreement that multiple motives exist for most, if not all, adult students. Tough (1968) and Burgess (1971) among others found this circumstance, and similar multiple reasons were reported among the informants described herein. Informant #7 had a typical response, although more elegantly put than most: "*Opening this new door gives*

*me two things - knowing power and earning power* ." Most informants had no difficulty stating which re-entry priority characterized their decision-making; only two of the whole sample did not voluntarily suggest a second or third priority.

2. Orientation of the decision-making activity.

As seen from Table 8 (Distribution of First Choices of Motives for Re-Entry), there appears to be two classes of reasons: reasons associated with occupations and reasons associated with various forms of self actualization . On the basis of the information contained in Table 9 (Source of Primary Interest for Re-Entry Using the Employment Model), the informants described by this study would have to be considered as having occupational motives for re-entry. This interpretation would result in non-support for the second hypothesis: that the most salient influence on the decision to re-enter will be self-actualization. The results would uphold the findings of Aslanian and Brickell (1980), Campbell (1984) Cross (1984).

However, I have proposed that propositions about motives require clarification because of conceptual confusion: terms such as instrumental, occupational and economic are used interchangeably and without negative equivalents. In the literature occupational motives are often treated as if they are not distinct from instrumental motives. Instrumental motives are not separated from economic motives. The equivalency of motives cannot be tested by meta-analysis because none

of the cited studies is a replication of another or some central model. Thus, it can only be said that there is *general* opposition in the literature. Against the occupational primacy findings, Burgess (1971), Morstain and Smart (1974) and Chapman (1986) argue that self-realization interests energize the decision to re-enter. This apparent discrepency may be resolvable if one considers that some fraction of occupational motives may be to fulfill needs of a *non-economic, psycho-social* nature, as suggested by Dubin and others (1976) with their concept of central life interests.

According to Dubin, et.al. (1976), one's central life interests may be non-economic, even though adults are *required* by normative expectations to play economic roles. Such findings are more consistent with the reward outcome models associated by Emerson (1981) with social psychology. Here, investments in one's human capital need not be limited to those having an economic pay-off, and may include self-actualizing strategies or the desire to please significant others. As Emerson (1981) noted in analyzing the roots of the social exchange model, the contribution of economic theory has been the association of choices between courses of action with [economic] return on investment. Although a comparison of Table 5 (Distribution of Occupations Before Re-entry) with Table 7 (Distribution of Preferred Future Occupations) suggests that upward socioeconomic mobility is the objective of returning to learning, this may be a partly unwarranted conclusion. It ignores the possibility that there can be different interpretations of influences, thus overlooking the relative importance of individual dispositions towards roles as suggested Dubin et. al. (1976).

Table 10 regrouped the data using the concept of Central Life Interests, which is more consistent with the social psychology tradition. Here, the data indicate that factors extrinsic to occupation were the most influential. Table 10, then would appear to reverse the findings in Table 9, and offer support for the second hypothesis. Still further supporting data are available from item 57, which was the unstructured item probing salience of reasons for returning. These data indicated the choice of non-economic influences were the primary influences for 61 per cent of the sample. This pattern is close to that of the recoded data of Table 10 establishing the primacy of non-economic motives (67 percent of the sample). The slippage between the two (6%) may partly be due to coding decisions made on item 57, which was unstructured.

With the second hypothesis now supported by recoded data in Table10, and with the confirming data from item 57, the proposition that motives for re-entry are more complex than the literature indicates becomes relevant for two reasons. First, an expanded model allows for incorporation of important non-rational elements of decision-making. Second, it allows for the possibility that some nontraditional students have noneconomic central life interests. This being the case, it is not surprising that many of people in this study of credential-seeking adult students exhibit the characteristics of Houle's (1961) learning-oriented person who is answer-seeking and has the desire for personal growth. As Informant #3 explained: "*I'm here to find out what makes the world tick, or not tick as the case may be, for my own satisfaction* ." The findings are consistent with Burgess's (1971) argument that the quest

for personal fulfillment, expressed as self-actualization, is an important motivator. Informant #8 said: "*I felt like a lower form of.life before [returning], but now I feel that I am no longer in danger of vegging out .*" As Informant #33 observed: "*There is satisfaction in using neurons instead of muscles - going to school has rescued my ego...*".

Although work-related difficulties such as the experience of credential barriers and job dissatisfaction prior to undertaking new learning were reported by many informants, motives for returning to learning were often found to be not employment related. One explanation for the apparent non-influence of experience with credential barriers already cited is that the central life interests of the student may not be associated primarily with work, as proposed by Dubin and his colleagues (1976). Or, as Hewitt (1984) argued, after unrewarding experiences in work, parenting or spouse roles, people may reorganize their reporting of these experiences to make them secondary. Informants #31 and #42 reported voluntarily leaving fairly well-paying jobs in mid-level white collar occupations to pursue something that interested them intellectually, although they knew it would pay less and had less occupational prestige.

Another explanation, following Hewitt (1984) is that attending university or community college may be compensatory, undertaken for personal empowerment or reempowerment . Such a strategy was importantly salient for many informants. For some like Informant #15 and Informant #23, it was important to "*show up* " family critics by doing well. For others, like Informant #7 and Informant #45, staying in

in school was proof to themselves of overcoming personal dysfunction (usually addictions of some sort). Informant #11 was determined to "*stick it to the [social welfare] system by escaping* ." Informant #41 was certain that credentials would provide "*a bullet-proof shield* ." Several informants reported seeing themselves as works-in-progress, suggesting Faulkner's (1974) notion that some people use the strategy of viewing oneself if not forever young, then forever promising.

3. Subjective sense of time.

A sense of urgency to complete the learning and earn the credential was particulary evident. The subjective sensation of fleeting time supports Neugarten (1969) and Dion (1985). Informant #36 said: "*Suddenly, it was quarter of a century later...how did that happen? I need to make up for lost time* ." Informant #9, who wanted an academic career, observed that "*I have to hurry and finish so I can get a career started before it's time for retirement* ." Some informants felt hurried to return to adult economic roles, usually to limit family sacrifices rather than for personal pecuniary gain. Informant #29 made the observation that "*When I went back to school, everybody in the family went because we all share in the tight [financial] times. I feel guilty* ."

**C. Satisfactions and difficulties associated with re-entry**

1. The socialization experience.

Becoming socialized to the role of student did not seem particularly difficult for most students, despite the contention of Jarvis (1985) that it is an ill-defined role. Although about half of the sample arrived on campus as isolates, the other half had some sort of reception committee

awaiting them or were part of a group of nontraditional students. This, according to Wheeler (1966), eases the period of initial entry because there are others present who can provide knowledge of what is expected. Informant #29 reported "*...whining and sniveling like a two-year old until my daughter (a second-year student) showed me where my classrooms were on the first day .*" Among the isolates were two informants who had visited the campus earlier with the express purpose of learning the floor plan. Informant #11 described making a "*...pre-emptive strike to spy out where things were so I wouldn't look like a tourist .*".

Only three informants reported feeling seriously out of place in the student setting, and all of them were over age 35. The contemporary informality of dress on campus made the transition easier for Informant #3, who reported "*....cheerfully putting away my rat race clothes and getting into my new student uniform - blue jeans and backpack .*" However, as Jarvis (1985:217) notes, adult performance of a role associated with youth may be complicated because the adult student is not inclined to accept some of the prescriptions; the traditional definition of a "good" student is one who sits passively and learns from the teacher, who is the fount of wisdom. This may explain why older nontraditional students perceived that they encountered resistance from instructors, as seen in Table 21 (Difficulty in Interacting with Academic Instructors by Age of Informant). Indeed, Informant #25 reported that "*...it's hard to take [instructor] seriously when he pontificates on things that happened in the 1960s when he was only just born !*" Informant #1 enjoyed "*the little head game between me and*

*some kid [instructor] who knows he outranks me academically but not chronologically* ".

Non-academic aspects of the campus were not viewed with such equanimity, as can be observed from Table 11 (Reactions of Informants to Institutional Arrangements). Nontraditional students attending the University of Lethbridge were likely to be critical of its academic counseling arrangements. Informant #33 declared that "*...the counselors are snake-bitten when it comes to mature students - they don't know what to do with somebody that treats school as a life-or-death business* ", while Informant #24 felt that "*the University is only looking for young Einsteins; we older ones are annoyances.* " Nontraditional students attending Lethbridge Community College were likely to be critical of the block scheduling and prescriptiveness of programs. Informant #26 observed that "*the program is as tyrannical as my job was - I hate that part of it - but at least they treat me like a person and not a five-digit payroll number* ."

Registration procedures are probably annoying to all students, but perhaps particularly so to nontraditional students who may be out of practice with bureaucratic intake procedures. Describing her University of Lethbridge experiences, Informant #25 said "*..admission procedures are like slough water - murky with a bottom of unknown depth* ." Informant # 13, a Lethbridge Community College student, complained that: "*...the hoop jumping is annoying for a grown person who is used to running a family or a business.*" That government transfer payments in the form of student loans and grants are geared to

single-role traditional students was keenly felt by some, confirming the earlier findings of Skelhorne (1975), Chapman (1986) and Thompson (1987). Informant #36 observed that "*refugees are treated better financially than mature students* ."

The reactions and assessments relating to academic counseling are consistent with the contentions of Skelhorne (1975), Zwerling (1976), Cross (1984) and Campbell (1984) that universities are incompletely attuned to nontraditional student needs. The data with regard to programming is consistent with the findings of Medsker et. al (1975) and Cross and Zusman (1979) relating to barriers to nontraditional participation that are more likely to be associated with community colleges, such as block scheduling. Overall, the patterns represented in Table 11 (Reactions of Informants to Institutional Arrangements) are consistent with Zwerling's (1976:281) characterization of universities as subject-oriented institutions and community colleges as student-oriented institutions.

2. Integrating student and adult roles.

From observing the data in Table 12 (Sources of Difficulties with Re-Entry Reported as Most Important), it can be seen that certain aspects of integrating the student role (a passive role) with existing adult roles (active roles) were more difficult than others. The primary source of difficulty was allocating sufficient time to each role to ensure at least minimal performance. Conflict was most likely occur was between care-giver roles and the student role, with the student role giving way to the care-giver role. Care-giving was not restricted to children (or in

two cases, grandchildren) of the informants: two informants were also care-givers for incapacitated parents or siblings. That family responsibilities were regarded with some ambivalence is evident from the comments of Informant #17 , who volunteered that: "*I sometimes feel trapped by family demands - I know some of my own personal potential as a student is being cut off* ."

Severe role conflict may have been limited or resisted by the reactions of significant others, as suggested by Kirk and Dorfman (1983), Voydnoff (1984) and Novak and Thacker (1989). Table 13 (Reactions of Significant Others to Re-Entry) indicates that for the most part, the informants in this study received at least a modicum of encouragement, approval and understanding, although children were more likely to be ambivalent. Informants often took proactive steps to enlist the cooperation of others in the family. Informant # 4 studied with her children at the kitchen table each evening, reporting that "*The kids love it that Mom also has homework because I can't nag them to do theirs if I am behind on mine* ." It may be significant that other mediating factors found to be present for informants included family work efforts, financial management, joint activities (including studying) and changing one's definition of the situation. These parallel those suggested by Voydanoff (1984:62-66) as strategies for coping with unemployment as a stressor.

The primary sources of satisfaction with the new educational enterprise (Table 15, Sources of Satisfaction Associated with Re-Entry Reported as Most Important) are clearly associated with self-actualization, which

supports the arguments of Burgess (1971), Bell (1982) and Chapman (1986). As with the interpretation of data relating to motives, however, there are multiple sources of satisfaction including those related to economic actualization. The array of satisfactions approximates Tough's (1979) clusters of personal feelings associated with anticipated benefits of engaging in learning. He suggests that there are three clusters: pleasure (happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment), self-esteem (regarding self more highly, feeling more confident) and the reactions of others (others regard one more highly). Informant #12 offered this response: "*I was always a quitter before sticking out upgrading and getting into university - it feels good to shed that label* ." Informant #4 said: "*my children now see me as more than 'just a mom* ." Informant #14, who had a prior history of substance abuse, observed that "*I'm a changed person due more to school than to the 5 years of sobriety - I finally believe I'm an O.K. person* ."

This study finds that the most salient sources of dissatisatisfaction with re-entry were external to the student, relating directly or indirectly to the multiple role set, while the most salient sources of satisfaction were internal, relating to self-actualization. However, as shown by Table 16 (Overall Rating of Present Life) and Table 17 (Overall Rating of Present Life Compared to Life Before Returning to Learning), informants seemed more pleased with their new lives than displeased. From this information, I conclude that the proposition stated in my third hypothesis is supported: that the nontraditional student role will be positively related to satisfaction with the student's present life.

**D. Influence of sociodemographic variables**

1. Influence of informant's gender.

As seen from Chapter IV, the informant's gender had limited statistically significant influence on the dependent variables, although negative correlations were found for female nontraditional students on many items. The most likely explanation for findings of non-significance is that the sample size was too small to reliably detect many of the effects. To summarize to the extent that it is warranted, interpretations arising from Table 18 (Effects of Informant's Gender on Selected Dependent Variables) suggest the following:

Perhaps the strongest evidence is that that female nontraditional students were more likely than than their male counterparts to experience difficulties with integrating two dissimilar roles. One reason women are likely to undertake a lighter academic schedule and experience more difficulty with integrating their student and adult roles may be that more of them are without the financial and parenting support of a spouse. Further, female nontraditional students who are married are considerably more likely to have a spouse who is ambivalent about the situation rather than supportive (Table 19, Spouse's Reaction to Returning to Learning, by Gender). This element is likely to contribute to stress associated with combining very dissimilar roles. As Informant #38 reported: "*My husband is usually upbeat about me being a student.....until the minute his dinner is late or his shirts aren't ironed .*" Another aspect of spousal ambivalence by male spouses confirms Chapman's (1986) finding that they may fear that their wives will discard them by reason of the independence additional education is

perceived to confer. As Informant #22 noted: "*My husband is afraid that an intellectual gulf will be created between us and that I will get bored with him* ." Thus, I conclude that the fifth hypothesis, that gender of the informant is significant for satisfactions and dissatisfactions associated with being a nontraditional student, is at least partly upheld.

Following Lowe (1987) and Mackie (1987), one reason women in the sample were less likely to be certain that they have been confronted by credential barriers may be because they have been socialized to have lower occupational expectations. In addition, women are more likely to attribute credential barriers to personal deficits rather than systemic deficits because women's socialization contributes to an external locus of control. This general sense of powerlessness is probably implicated in the finding that women in the sample were more likely to feel a greater sense of personal urgency to attend full time, perhaps because female non-traditional students may have more of a need for self-empowerment than men. This would be consistent with the proposition that women are generally disadvantaged in terms of social and economic power (Voydnaoff, 1984; Guppy et. al., 1986; Mackie, 1987), and may have a stronger compensatory component than men associated with their expectations of the outcomes of the re-entry enterprise.

Korman (1969) argues that choice of occupation conforms to a self-consistency element of cognition in which self-esteem is a key predictor of occupational choice. This may help to explain why sources of interest in occupations for women in this sample were more associated with a

non-work central life interest, given that occupational conditions such as work schedule flexibility and service to the community are seen as desirable. It is important to note, however, that there was no statistically significant difference between males and females with regard to the salience of motives for re-entry. Thus, my fourth proposition that gender of the informant will effect the motive for re-entry is not upheld.

2. Influence of informant's age.

Similar to the informant's gender, his or her age had no consistent influence on the dependent variables. It should be noted however, that older students appeared to have more difficulty fitting into the student role than their younger counterparts. As with the effects of the gender of informants, the most likely explanation for the occurences of non significance is probably that the sample size was too small to reliably detect many of the effects. My arbitrary division of the data into two categories based on splitting the sample at age 35 captured some variance, but the variance was not particularly enhanced by splitting the sample at ages 30 or 40. To summarize to the extent that it is warranted, the data in Table 20 (Effects of Informant's Age on Selected Dependent Variables) suggests several things.

Contrary to the assertion by Cross (1984) that age is an important predictor of re-entry for part-time adults in continuing education, in this study of adults in education the informant's age had limited statistically significant influence on one of the two main dependent variables (re-entry decision). Besides the issue of the small sample, this result is probably associated with the trigger event. There is some

support for the proposition that the trigger event and the life-space evaluation which often followed took place around age 35, but the high rate of occurence in the entire sample does not support this as purely a midlife phenomenon, or indeed related to any particular age. While first divorces may perhaps be associated with the late 20s or early 30s (Stout, 1987), widowhood is usually a later event. In this sample, the informants who had lost spouses by death were widowed in their 30s. Informants did not appear to suffer a midlife crisis in the way it is conceptualized by Levinson (1978). Indeed, as Lowenthal et. al (1975) argued, adults who are required to deal with central role transitions may anticipate change as freedom.

The other main dependent variable (experiences after re-entry) is more clearly influenced by age than is the decision to re-enter. Older nontraditional students were more likely to experience difficulties interacting with instructors than are their younger counterparts. One reason for this may be that the normal age differential associated with the student and instructor roles is very narrow or in some cases, reversed if the student is older than the instructor. Informant #30 observed that "*...the instructor seemed to resent it that I could remember things from real life that he could only read about in a text book or watch on a video .*" It may also be that the older student who has a history of independence of action does not take readily to the passive role associated with being a student. Informant #48 commented that "*the assumption of tabula rasa is absurd for mature students - I resent being treated like a parrot-in-training .*"

Older nontraditional students were more likely to report gaining a sense of satisfaction from progress towards economic goals, which may in part be a function of their awareness of subjective time. The notion of retirement loomed large for many informants in this age group, who felt that time was against them. Informant #2, speculating on the future, noted that "*by the time I am done I will have less time to work [until retirement] than I have already wasted in menial jobs, so this degree needs to pay off with a big dollar job* ." At age 46, Informant #36 forecast: "*even with my degree, I will never catch up with the younger [mature] students - I'm behind before I even get to start on a new career* ."

Although all but two informants rated their present lives postively in comparison to their lives before re-entry, those under age 35 were more likely to rate themselves as "much happier" rather than "somewhat happier". One explanation for this finding is that the younger age group may have more experience with credential barriers, marriage breakdown, unemployment or underemployment, and may have higher educational expectations than those in the older age group. Progress towards an educational goal may be more salient for the younger nontraditional student. Underlying this may be a sense that the younger student has a better chance to use the education fruitfully, which was echoed in the comments of several older students who felt themselves forever "behind".

Thus, in general there is support for my sixth and final hypothesis that the age of the informant will have an effect on the experiences

associated with returning to learning such that the older student experiences more difficulty.

3. Socioeconomic status. There is also the proposition in the literature that participation in adult education is linked to socioeconomic status, such that those with higher wages and occupational status are more likely to attend (Miller, 1967; Cross, 1984). No assertion can made about the influence of socioeconomic status on re-entry for nontraditional students because the data are still too thinly collected. This sample, however can be described as consisting of many individuals in the lower ranges of commonly-used descriptions of "middle class" in terms of pre-entry family incomes and occupations. The results of Table 3 (Distribution of Family Pretax Incomes) show that the family income of informants were generally in the lower third of the range of Alberta families. The average family in 1985 in Alberta had an annual pretax income of $40,736, which is 107 per cent of the national annual pretax income of $38,059 per family (Statistics Canada, 1988). Many of the informants are single parents, with females representing all but one case. This group has been noted for being more susceptible to poverty than any other except for aged single women (Voydanoff, 1984).

If a speculation is warranted on the basis of this information, it is that propositions rooted in Maslow's (1954) hierachy of needs are not supported. By those propositions, informants struggling with basic economic subsistence, such as single mothers, should not be found in the full-time population of nontraditional students in mainstream

postsecondary education because they are too busy with trying to survive (Miller, 1967). Nor should persons with dysfunctional personal or family histories who are struggling with personal esteem be present because they are thought to be too threatened by the institutional environment with its formal evaluation requirements (Cross, 1984). But these two groups are indeed present in this sample. Five informants (usually solo mothers) with a history of transfer payment dependence were found. As Informant #27 commented: "*student loans are a luxury after welfare* ." Four informants with recent histories of moderate to severe substance abuse or abuse inflicted by others were also present.

**E. Summary of Hypothesis Testing**

Of the six hypotheses stated in Chapter II, the first, third and sixth are supported by the findings of this study. The decision of sample members to re-enter was found to be positively associated with the presence of a triggering event in their lives in the immediate past. The nontraditional student role was found to be positively related to satisfaction with the sample members' present life spaces, and the experiences associated with re-entry were found to be significantly influenced by the age of sample members such that nontraditional students age 36 and over experienced more difficulty.

The second hypothesis that personal growth motives would be the most salient for the decision to re-enter proved to be supportable only by a somewhat convoluted recoding. However, it has been suggested that there may be a conceptual difficulty with the description of this sample as having occupation motives if occupational motives are defined as

being of a strictly economic nature. The fifth hypothesis which proposed that the gender of sample members would be significant for satisfactions and dissatisfactions associated with being a nontraditional student was only partly upheld although the variances were generally in a negative direction for women. The fourth hypothesis which proposed that the gender of sample members would effect the motive for re-entry was similarly partly supported.

It has been noted in both Chapter III (Methodology) and in this chapter that there are severe limitations to analysis of the data by reason of the small size of the sample. This may be one reason that the two gender-related hypotheses were equivocally supported, because this result runs counter to both intuition and to the literature associated with gender issues. It is therefore relevant to suggest that any replication of this study should be on a scale large enough to allow for inferential statistics. A further difficulty with interpretation has been the issue of comparabilty: this study did not collect comparative data on other groups, namely traditional students, part-time nontraditional students and adults in the same age range who have not returned to learning.

# CHAPTER VI
# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What then, is the relevance of the interpretations contained in Chapter V to the two research questions, and how do they relate to the sociological problem? To recapitulate, the sociological problem is: to what extent does the literature of adult education describe the 49 people interviewed for this study who are nontraditional students *in* [main track] postsecondary education? There are two central questions addressed by this research, each of which is associated with a major dependent variable: what are some of the factors which affected the decision of these 49 nontraditional students to re-enter postsecondary education, and what are some of the sources of satisfaction and of strain that these mature students experience from their educational re-entry?

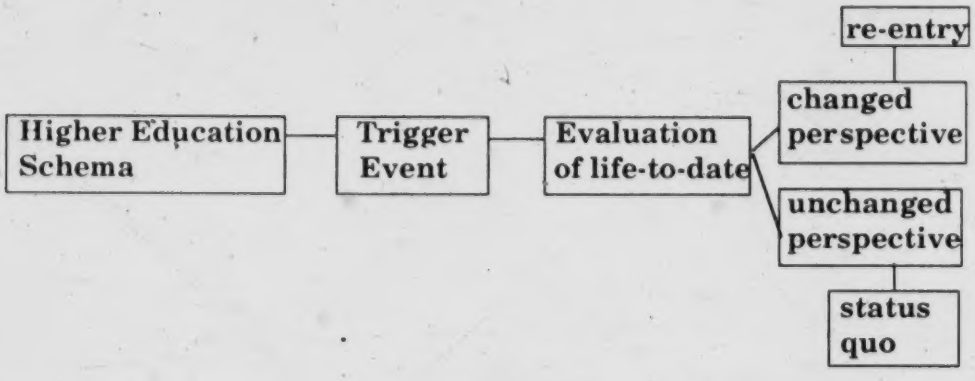
## A. Conceptual Model of Causal Sequence Leading to Re-Entry of Nontraditional Students

In Chapter V, several elements of the informant's pre-entry life were posited to contribute to the decision to return to learning. These included the presence of a re-entry schema, the occurence of a trigger event and a change of perspective on one's life space. However, it was argued that the first hypothesis, that the decision to re-enter non-compulsory institutional education will be positively associated with the presence of a triggering event in the life of the re-entrant in the immediate past, is too broad. This proposition requires that subsidiary propositions be set out: first, that the triggering event is positively

associated with a re-evaluation of the present life-space; and second, that the re-evaluation of the present life space is negatively associated with non-action (maintaining the status quo ) and positively associated with action (re-entry).

To represent the pre-entry part of the description of these informants graphically, a diagram of causal sequence modeled on Cross's (1984) Chain of Response (COR) model suggests itself. The individual may have an alternative vision of personal reality in which the individual can visualize himself or herself actually returning to learning, but the acts leading to re-entry and actual participation are options chosen after the trigger event. The trigger event is likely to be associated with re-evaluation of one's life experience and a heightened perception of limited time left for second chances. The trigger event becomes a *window of opportunity* .

Figure 1
Suggested Conceptual Model of Causal Sequence
Leading to Re-Entry of the Informant



There is a difficulty in portraying vertical interaction in a diagram which suggests a horizontal progression of events, along with the usual caveat about the inherent problems of linear models which assume steady-states. This stated, in this model, re-entry is the dependent variable and the model may conform to Rubenson's (1977) proposition that participation rests on the sum of values one places on positive factors associated with pursuing higher education (such as self-realization or accessing an occupation with higher pay) and negative factors (such as seeing less of one's family or financial hardship).

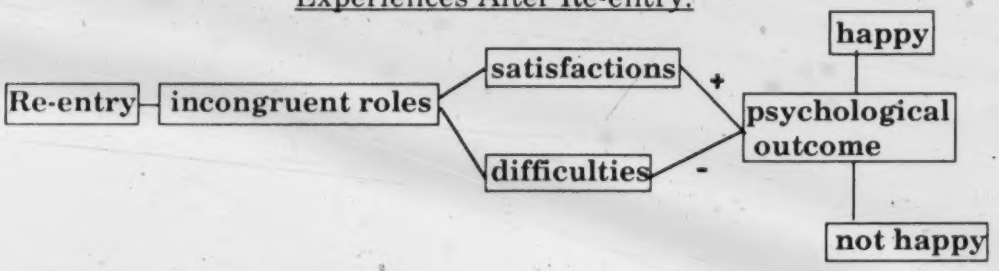
This model, however, also has the problems typical of any hierarchical model in that events may not proceed in a sequential manner. This was clearly so for Informant #8, who evaluated her life, found that she felt like nothing, and then "*removed the source of my nothingness by leaving my husband* " before she re-entered. For informant #11, the trigger event (divorce) did not lead to a change perpective at first. The intervening low-quality of the informant's first work experience, reported as "*being caught like a rat in a maze - just like being married* " led to a second re-evaluation and a subsequent testing of re-entry as another option.

**B. Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Experience After Re-entry**

In Chapter V, a number of satisfactions and difficulties associated with the informant's re-entry were interpreted. This study finds that the most salient sources of dissatisfaction with re-entry were external to the student, relating directly or indirectly to the multiple role set. The

most salient sources of satisfaction were internal, relating to self-actualization. To represent the post-entry part of the description of these informants graphically, a second diagram of a suggested causal sequence is presented. Figure 2 is again modeled along the lines of Cross's (1984) Chain of Response concept, and the same cautions apply to it that apply to Figure 1.

Figure 2
Suggested Conceptual Model of Informant's Experiences After Re-entry.




The student role introduces a new set of stressors into the individual's life situation which may be compounded by stressors associated with the trigger event. Pre-existing sources of stress may have included financial hardship or loss of valued social role (provider or care-giver) which are exacerbated by having to adapt to the new and demanding student role. As one with maturing children leaving the family home, Informant #49 commented: "[*My ]life is a mixture of nostalgia for the past and confusion about the future....can an old dog learn new tricks?*" The ambiguity of the nontraditional student role produced anxiety for Informant #6, who said: "*...being an older student is like living a Shirley MacLaine adventure - whoever knows if can you get there from here isn't telling* <u>*us*</u> *!*"

In general, however, the structure of dissatisfactions and satisfactions can also be seen in terms of Rubenson's (1977) Expectancy-Valance paradigm to the extent that satisfactions must clearly outweigh dissatisfactions to produce the results favouring satisfaction which are presented in Table 16 (Overall Rating of Present Life) and Table 17 (Overall Rating of Present LifeCompared to Pre-Entry Life-Space). Informant #39 summed up this situation by remarking that "....*going back to school is bittersweet because it means leaving some people behind ,to reconstruct 'tomorrow' according to how I now see things. But you take the good with the bad and I wouldn't trade where I am now for where I was before.*"

**C. Reconsideration of the Sociological Problem**

At the beginning of this study, a distinction was made between adult education and adults *in* education. The former refers to specially constructed education which is most often part-time, administered separately and diffently from conventional postsecondary education and is usually an adjunct to one's typical adult roles. The latter refers to adults who are participating full-time in education designed principally for younger students, and who are thus nontraditional students in conventional education. Given the as-yet slim volume of empirical data on adults *in* education, of what use has it been to use the literature of adult education to describe the 49 informants who are nontraditional students in main track postsecondary education?

This study has suggested that the adult education literature may contain at least two problems for describing adults *in* education, or at

least the 49 nontraditional students who took part in this study. First, it has been argued that there may be a difficulty in the assumptions of Aslanian and Brickell (1980), Campbell (1984) and Cross (1984) about participants in adult education, who are asserted to engage in recurrent education for occupational reasons which are purely economic.

Second, the variables of age and gender which are important descriptors of adults participating in specially designed education did not well describe these particular adults in main track postsecondary education. It has been argued that one source of this circumstance is probably the small size of the sample. However, it may be significant that in three Canadian studies of nontraditional students; the current one, its predecessor (Thompson, 1987), and that of Chapman (1986), the informants averaged about 36 years of age. Studies of people in American adult education by Boaz (1978) and Cross (1984) reported similar findings. People who are presently in their third decade are technically part of the Baby Boom generation. Are the factors of social change affecting this group the same ones driving enrolment in adult education as those which are driving nontraditional enrolment in maintrack postsecondary education?

What are the implications of these two findings for future research? One is that by reason of the proposed problem underlying occupationally-oriented assumptions about why people return to learning, considerably more research will be needed to sort out the psycho-social components of choice. The source of this problem may be the uncritical equating of occupational motives with economic orientation. It may be

that participants in adult education, which is a part-time enterprise, do indeed have different patterns of motivation than do those who are full-time nontraditional students. They have different patterns of participation and it is conceivable that these may be the outcomes of different pre-entry influences.

Another implication is that empirical studies need to be extended to compare the re-entry motives and post-entry experiences of adults participating in adult education with adults *in* education. To the extent that speculation may be useful for future research, the most important difference between these two groups of adult students may not be in motives for returning to learning, but in the experiences which result from it. It seems likely that the adult *in* education will experience more role difficulties, such as role conflict and role overload. This person has taken on an atypical student role associated with and designed for younger people. The role often requires that adult roles retained by the student be subordinated, especially where attendence is full-time. In contrast, the adult attending part-time programs specially dedicated to adults with other resonsibilities is in the position of being able to subordinate education to these other roles with relative ease.

Finally, what are the implications of this study for institutional policies? The author's previous study (Thompson, 1987), the study of Chapman (1986) and an earlier study by Skelhorne (1975) all found that the institutional arrangements of universities affecting nontraditional students were perceived with ambivalence by (the members of

this clientele who were) informants. The same general finding was generated and extended by this study: although the institutional arrangements of the university and the community college do differ, each engendered configurations of ambivalence. The ultimate source of ambivalence identified by the studies mentioned was the perceived indifference of the "system" to the differences between nontraditional students and their traditional counterparts. It should be noted that all of these studies except the present one dealt with nontraditional student in university rather than in community colleges. This suggests that the universities from which samples for these studies were drawn had not at the time come fully to terms with the nontraditional clientele and may have lacked policies to fully address their differences from traditional students.

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APPENDIX 1

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview No. _____ Length over interview _____

| Var | Question |
|---|---|
| 001 | Respondent is: ❑ male ❑ female |
| 002 | Educational institution attending<br>❑ University of Lethbridge ❑ Lethbridge Community College |
| 003 | Residence located in<br>❑ City ❑Town ❑ Rural |
| 004 | Ethnic grouping<br>❑ Native ❑ Non-native |
| 005 | In what year were you born? _____ |

In addition to being a student, what kinds of **regular** responsibilities or activities are typical of your life during the school year (activity of 3-5 hours perweek).

006 ❑ volunteer work _____

007 ❑ part-time work _____

008 ❑ parenting _____

009 ❑ spouse _____

010 ❑ other _____

011 Do you have children living with you?

❑ Yes
❑ No **Go to question 19**

012 How many children live in your household? _____

What are the ages of the children living in your household?

013 _____

014 _____

015 _____

016 _____

What child care arrangements do you use on a regular basis?

017 _____

018 About how many times during the last session were you called away from class or skipped class to attend to your family's needs? _____ times

Type(s) of situation involved in (18)

019 _____

020 What approximately was your usual yearly family income before you began studying.

_____

021 What approximately was your usual yearly family income after you began studying.

_____

022 What is your present marital status?

_____

023 What was you highest level of education before returning to school?

_____

024 Which of the following best describes your usual working situation before you became a student.

- ❑ employed full-time
- ❑ employed part-time, permanent
  average hours per week____
- ❑ employed part-time, casual on call
  average hours per week___
- ❑ unemployed
- ❑ volunteering
- ❑ housework
- ❑ ill or injured, unable to work temporarily
- ❑ ill or injured, unable to do same work permanently

025 What was your usual job title?

_____

026 Think back about the last **paid** job you had in your usual occupation before you started studying. What was your general level of satisfaction?

- ❑ very satisfied
- ❑ generally satified
- ❑ neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ❑ generally dissatisfied
- ❑ very dissatisfied

What (if anything) did you like most about the type of work you were doing?

027 _____

What (if anything) did you like least about the type of work you were doing?

028 _____

029 **(Ask if living with spouse or spouse equivalent only. Oth erwise go to question 32)**
What kind of work does your spouse/companion normally do ?

- ❑ employed full-time
- ❑ employed part-time
- ❑ unemployed
- ❑ volunteering
- ❑ housework
- ❑ ill or injured, unable to work

030 **(Ask if spouse employed for wages. Otherwise go to ques tion 32)**

What is your spouse's/companion's usual job title?

_____

031 What is your spouse's/companion's highest level of education?

_____

032 Did you ever experience any barriers to jobs or promotions due to your previous level of educational achievement

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ dk

Please describe what happened to you.

033 _____

How did you feel when this happened to you.

034 _____

What is your current program of study?

035 Faculty/department_____

(Major or concentration)_____

036 What credential will you have when your present program is complete?

_____

037 Do you have in mind an occupation in which you hope to find work in when you are finished with your new education?

❑ Yes Specify _____

❑ No **(go to question 39)**

Why is this occupation attractive to you?

038 _____

There are many types of education available to people over the age of 25 to choose from. Why did you choose....

full-time versus part-time study

039_____

community college instead of university (**or vice versa**)

040 _____

classroom learning versus correspondence courses such as Athabasca University?

_____

042 Why did you not to continue on in school directly from high school?

_____

043 How much had going back to school been on your mind before you decided to come back to school?

❑ thought about it often (weeky)
❑ thought about it occasionally (monthly)
❑ thought about it rarely (once or twice a year)

**Think about your life in the three years before you de cided to come back to school.**

044 Were there any unusual events which took place in your life in the two years before you decided to come back to school?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Please describe these events :

045 _____

What was the impact of this (these) unusual event(s) on you

046A _____

What process lead from the event to re-entry

046B _____

There are many reasons people want to return to school. From the following list of many *possible* reasons, how important was each to you personally? **(Present cue booklet page 3)**

1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 a little important
4 not at all important

5 not applicable

047 wanted to be better informed (new knowledge)
1 2 3 4 5

048 wanted to learn new skills for occupational purposes
1 2 3 4 5

049 wanted to get into an occupation which contributes to the community
1 2 3 4 5

050 frustrated with my job at the time
1 2 3 4 5

051 bored with my home routine
1 2 3 4 5

052 felt left out by the intellectual progress of spouse or chil dren
1 2 3 4 5

053 wanted to explore my own self-potential
1 2 3 4 5

054 wanted to meet new people
1 2 3 4 5

055 wanted the personal pride of a university degree/college diploma
1 2 3 4 5

056 n. had health problems and needed to change occupations
1 2 3 4 5

What would you say was/were the most important factor(s) in your decision to go back to school

057 _____

In a usual session, how many courses on average do you take?

059 _____ courses _____ hours

What factors do you consider to make decisions about which classes to take? How important are each of the following to you? **(Present cue booklet page 3)**

1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important nor unimportant
4 not very important
5 not important at all

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 060 | e. it is a required course | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 061 | a. the course fits around my family routine | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 062 | b. for personal interest | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 063 | g. the course content will be of practical use | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

064 Which of the following situation best describes your first week at college/university?

∞ knew no one on campus
∞ had friends/acquaintances starting at the same time
∞ had friends/acquaintances attending who had started previously

What have been your **first** experiences with the following aspects of campus life? **(Present cue booklet page 2)**

1 a big problem
2 sometimes a problem
3 a little problem
4 not a problem at all

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 065 | finding my way around campus | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 066 | study skills | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 067 | time management | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 068 | managing exam anxiety | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 069 | getting help from advisors | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 070 | getting along with instructors | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

What have been your experiences with the following aspects of home life? **(Present cue booklet page 2)**

1 a big problem
2 sometimes a problem
3 a little problem
4 not a problem at all

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 071 | getting to/from the campus | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 072 | arranging child care | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 073 | .finding time for leisure activities | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 074 | finding time for my family | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 075 | making ends meet financially | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 076 | keeping up with housework | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

**(Ask if respondent has spouse or equivalent. Othewise, go to question 78)**
How did your spouse/companion react to you becoming a student.

077 _____

**(Ask of respondent has children. Otherwise, go to question 79)**
How did your children react to you becoming a student.

078 _____

**(Ask of respondent has mother living. Otherwise, go to question 80)**
How did your mother react to you becoming a student.

079 _____

**(Ask of respondent has father living. Otherwise, go to question 81)**
How did your father react to you becoming a student.

080 _____

**(Ask if respondent has brother living. Otherwise, go to question 82)**
How did your brother react to you becoming a student.

081 _____

**(Ask of respondent has sister living. Otherwise, go to question 83)**

How did your sister react to you becoming a student.

082 _____

Do you ever experience any of the following feelings as a result of being a student?

083 Feeling guilty about family time sacrifices
- ❑ Yes ❑ No **(go to question 84)**
- ❑ a great deal
- ❑ some
- ❑ none

084 Feeling guilty about family financial sacrifices
- ❑ Yes ❑ No **(go to question 85)**
- ❑ a great deal
- ❑ some
- ❑ none

085 Feeling my family responsibilities get in the way of my ability explore my own self-potential
- ❑ Yes ❑ No **(go to question 86)**
- ❑ a great deal
- ❑ some
- ❑ none

What are the main satisfactions of being a student?

086 _____

What are the main dissatisfactions of being a student?

087 _____

Compare yourself to the younger students whom you go to school with those just out of high school

How do you see yourself in relation to them?

088 _____

How well do you think the college/university responds to the over-25 students?

Opinion of instructors

089 _____

090 Have you ever encountered an instructor hostile to mature students?

❑ Yes ❑ No

091 Opinion of academic advisors

_____

092 Have you ever encountered an academic advisor hostile to ma ture students?

❑ Yes ❑ No

What has been your experience with registration personnel?

093 _____

094 On balance, how would you rate your life now.

1 highly satisfactory
2 somewhat satisfactory
3 neither satisfactory or unsatisfactory
4 somewhat unsatisfactory
5 highly unsatisfactory

095 Compared with your life before coming back to school, would you say you are

1 much happier than before
2 somewhat happier than before
3 neither happier or less happy than before
4 somewhat less happy than before
5 much less happy than before

What do you think your university degree [or community college diploma] will add to your life?

096 _____

Are there any other issues related to being an over-25 student that you would like to discuss?

APPENDIX 2
CODING MANUAL

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 001 | Sex of respondent | |
| SEX | 1 | male |
| | 2 | female |
| 002 | institution attending | |
| INST | 1 | University of Lethbridge |
| | 2 | Lethbridge Community College |
| 003 | residence area | |
| RES | 1 | City of Lethbridge |
| | 2 | regional town |
| | 3 | rural area |
| 004 | ethnic group | |
| ETHN | 1 | native |
| | 2 | non-native |
| 005 | -- | |
| AGE | | |
| | other activities in addition to student role | |
| 006 | volunter work | |
| ACTVOL | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 007 | part-time paid work | |
| ACTWRK | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 008 | parenting | |
| ACTPARE | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 009 | spouse or spouse equivalent | |
| ACTSPOU | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 010 | other | |
| ACTOTH | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 011 | children living with R | |
| CHDLIVE | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 012 | number of children in household | |
| CHDNBR | __ | |
| | 99 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 013 | age of child #1 | |
| CHD1 | __ | |
| | 99 | |
| 014 | age of child #2 | |
| CHD2 | __ | |
| | 99 | |
| 015 | age of child #3 | |
| CHD3 | _ | |
| | 99 | |
| 016 | most common mode of child care | |
| CHDCARE | 1 | not required-child older |
| | 2 | family member |
| | 3 | friend |
| | 4 | paid day care |
| | 5 | R schedule juggle |
| | 99 | |
| 018 | number of times classes skipped for family responsibilities | |
| SKIP | __ | |
| | 99 | |
| 019 | major type of reason(s) for skipping | |
| WHYSKIP | 1 | child ill |
| | 2 | parent or spouse ill |
| | 3 | problem with spouse or parent |
| | 4 | problem with child |
| | 99 | |
| 020 | annual family pretax income before | |
| BEFINC | 1 | under $9999 |
| | 2 | 10000-15000 |
| | 3 | 15001-20000 |
| | 4 | 20001-25000 |
| | 5 | 25001-30000 |
| | 6 | 30001-35000 |
| | 7 | 35001-40000 |
| | 8 | 40001 and up |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 021 | annual family pretax income after | |
| AFTINC | 1 | under $9999 |
| | 2 | 10000-15000 |
| | 3 | 15001-20000 |
| | 4 | 20001-25000 |
| | 5 | 25001-30000 |
| | 6 | 30001-35000 |
| | 7 | 35001-40000 |
| | 8 | 40001 and up |
| 022 | marital status | |
| MSTAT | 1 | single, never married |
| | 2 | divorced or separated |
| | 3 | widowed |
| | 4 | married or equivalent |
| 023 | respondent's highest level of educational attainment before | |
| REDUC | 1 | less than grade 10 |
| | 2 | grades 10, 11 completed |
| | 3 | grade 12 (13 in Ontario) completed |
| 024 | respondent's work status before | |
| RWKSTAT | 1 | employed full-time for wages |
| | 2 | employed part-time for wages |
| | 3 | employed on a casual basis |
| | 4 | unemployed, looking for work |
| | 5 | housework |
| | 6 | volunteer work |
| | 7 | ill/injured, unable to work |
| 025 | respondent's work category (Blishen SES groupings) | |
| RWKCAT | _____ | |
| 026 | overall satisfaction with type of employment | |
| WKSAT1 | 1 | very satisfied |
| | 2 | somewhat satisified |
| | 3 | neither satisfied nor dissatisfied |
| | 4 | somewhat dissatisfied |
| | 5 | very dissatisfied |
| | 99 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 038B | locus of interest RECODE 1 | |
| OCCINT2 | 1 | intrinsic to employment (categories 1,2,3) |
| | 2 | extrinsic to employment (categories 4,5,6) |
| | 99 | |
| 038C | locus of interest RECODE 2 | |
| OCCINT3 | 1 | economic (categories 1,3) |
| | 2 | non-economic (categoires 2,4,5,6) |
| | 99 | |
| 039 | why full-time versus part-time | |
| FTIME | 1 | system requirement (institution or funding agency) |
| | 3 | personal preference |
| 040 | why this institution | |
| WHYI | 1 | no alternative in respondent's chosen program |
| | 2 | required by funding agency |
| | 3 | personal preference |
| 041 | why classroom versus distance learning | |
| CLASS | 1 | unaware of distance learning |
| | 2 | need classroom discipline for learning |
| | 3 | recognition of credential |
| 042 | why did respondent not continue after high school | |
| HCONT | 1 | found good job |
| | 2 | family or personal dysfunction |
| | 3 | family discouraged respondent |
| | 4 | did not think it was necessary |
| | 5 | did not think I was capable |
| | 6 | marriage |
| 043 | what is status of notion to return | |
| NOTION | 1 | new idea |
| | 2 | long-term goal |
| 044 | was there a triggering event in the previous 24 months | |
| TRIG1 | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no (if not, go to question 047) |
| 045 | what was the nature of this triggering event | |
| TRIG2 | 1 | spouse died |
| | 2 | divorced |
| | 3 | moved |
| | 4 | inheritance |
| | 5 | job loss |
| | 6 | vocational counseling |
| | 7 | other |
| | 99 | |

046A What was the reaction of R?
TRIG3
1 negative
2 positive
3 initially negative changing to positive

046B Did R go through a priority review self-exercise re 045
TRIG 4
1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important or unimportant
4 somewhat unimportant
5 very unimportant

Salience of reasons for returning

047 wanted to be better informed for own satisfaction
RET1
1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important or unimportant
4 somewhat unimportant
5 very unimportant

048 wanted to learn new skills for occupational purposes
RET2
1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important or unimportant
4 somewhat unimportant
5 very unimportant

049 wanted access to an occupation which contributes to community
RET3
1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important or unimportant
4 somewhat unimportant
5 very unimportant

050 frustrated with existing occupation
RET4
1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important or unimportant
4 somewhat unimportant
5 very unimportant

051 bored with existing homelife
RET5
1 very important
2 somewhat important
3 neither important or unimportant
4 somewhat unimportant
5 very unimportant

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 052 | felt left behind by intellectual progress of significant other(s) | |
| RET6 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 53 | wanted to explore my own potential | |
| RET7 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 054 | wanted to meet new people | |
| RET8 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 055 | wanted personal pride of a post-secondary credential | |
| RET9 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 056 | other | |
| RET10 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| | 99 | |
| 057 | most important factors from 056 list | |
| RESAL | 1 | employment-related |
| | 2 | self-realization-related |
| 058 | average number of courses taken in a semester (university) | |
| LOAD1 | ____ | |
| | 99 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 059 | average number of hours taken in a semester (college) | |
| LOAD2 | ___ | |
| | 99 | |
| | basis for making class choices | |
| 060 | required in the program | |
| CHOIC1 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 061 | fits around my outside responsibilities | |
| CHOIC2 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 062 | for personal interest | |
| CHOIC3 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 063 | for practical content | |
| CHOIC4 | 1 | very important |
| | 2 | somewhat important |
| | 3 | neither important or unimportant |
| | 4 | somewhat unimportant |
| | 5 | very unimportant |
| 064 | intitial socialization situation | |
| INSOC1 | 1 | knew nobody |
| | 2 | had friends/acquaintances ahead |
| | 3 | came in with group of friends/acquaintances |
| | difficulties of initial socialization period-school | |
| 065 | finding my way around | |
| INSOC2 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 066 | study skills | |
| INSOC3 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 067 | time management | |
| INSOC4 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 068 | test anxiety | |
| INSOC5 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 069 | accessibility of advice | |
| INSOC6 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 070 | getting along with instructors | |
| INSOC7 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| | difficulties of initial socialization period-home | |
| 071 | transportation | |
| DIFHO1 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 072 | child care | |
| DIFHO2 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| | 99 | |
| 073 | leisure time | |
| DIFHO3 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 74 | family time | |
| DIFHO4 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| | 99 | |
| 075 | financial management | |
| DIFHO5 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 076 | housekeeping | |
| DIFHO6 | 1 | very difficult |
| | 2 | somewhat difficult |
| | 3 | neither difficult or easy |
| | 4 | somewhat easy |
| | 5 | very easy |
| 077 | spouse's reaction to R's returning to learning | |
| SPORE | 1 | favourable |
| | 2 | unfavourable |
| | 3 | ambivalent |
| | 99 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 078 | children's reaction to R's returning to learning | |
| CHDRE | 1 | favourable |
| | 2 | unfavourable |
| | 3 | ambivalent |
| | 99 | |
| 079 | mothers's reaction to R's returning to learning | |
| MARE | 1 | favourable |
| | 2 | unfavourable |
| | 3 | ambivalent |
| | 99 | |
| 080 | father's reaction to R's returning to learning | |
| PARE | 1 | favourable |
| | 2 | unfavourable |
| | 3 | ambivalent |
| | 99 | |
| 81 | male siblings' reaction to R's returning to learning | |
| BRORE | 1 | favourable |
| | 2 | unfavourable |
| | 3 | ambivalent |
| | 99 | |
| 082 | female sibling's reaction to R's returning to learning | |
| SISRE | 1 | favourable |
| | 2 | unfavourable |
| | 3 | ambivalent |
| | 99 | |
| 083 | degree of guilt felt over family time sacrifices | |
| GUILT1 | 1 | a great deal |
| | 2 | some |
| | 3 | none |
| | 99 | |
| 084 | degree of guilt felt over family financial sacrifices | |
| GUILT2 | 1 | a great deal |
| | 2 | some |
| | 3 | none |
| | 99 | |
| 085A | degree of resentment for family responsibilities | |
| RESENT | 1 | a great deal |
| | 2 | some |
| | 3 | none |
| | 99 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 085B | did subjective sense of time change? | |
| | 1 | yes (to time left) |
| | 2 | no |
| 086 | what are the main satifactions of being a student | |
| STUSAT | 1 | economic gains |
| | 2 | non-economic gains |
| 087 | what are the main dissatisfactions of being a student | |
| STUDIS | 1 | economic limitations |
| | 2 | non-economic limitations |
| 088 | advantages of age over youth as a student | |
| STUADV | 1 | better self-disciplined |
| | 2 | practical knowhow to anchor learning |
| | 3 | more tolerant of systemic difficulties |
| | 4 | more goal oriented |
| | opinion of response of institution to older students | |
| 089 | instructors on average | |
| ISTX1 | 1 | very supportive |
| | 2 | somewhat supportive |
| | 3 | neither supportive or non-supportive |
| | 4 | somewhat non-supportive |
| | 5 | very non-supportive |
| 090 | experience with an instructor perceived hostile to mature | |
| INSTX2 | students | |
| | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 091 | advisors on average | |
| ADV1 | 1 | very supportive |
| | 2 | somewhat supportive |
| | 3 | neither supportive or non-supportive |
| | 4 | somewhat non-supportive |
| | 5 | very non-supportive |
| 092 | experience with an advisor perceived hostile to mature | |
| ADV2 | students | |
| | 1 | yes |
| | 2 | no |
| 094 | present rating of life as a mature student | |
| LIFER | 1 | highly satisfactory |
| | 2 | somewhat satisfactory |
| | 3 | neither satisfactory or unsatisfactory |
| | 4 | somewhat unsatisfactory |
| | 5 | very unsatisfactory |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 095 | general rating of life now compared to before returning to | |
| HAPR | learning | |
| | 1 | much happier than before |
| | 2 | somewhat happier than before |
| | 3 | the same as before |
| | 4 | somewhat less happy than before |
| | 5 | much less happy than before |
| 096 | what will the credential add to R's life | |
| CREDADD | 1 | economic |
| | 2 | non-economic |